

# COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

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## *Can Public TV Stand Up?*

**WHY ITS NEWS GENE IS WEAK** by Elizabeth Jensen

**WHAT THE U.S. IS MISSING** by Emily Bell

**TOWARD AN AMERICAN WORLD SERVICE** by Lee C. Bollinger

### **TUCKER CARLSON'S NOISY CALLER**

JOEL MEARES

### **WILL 'DIGITAL FIRST' BRING PROFITS TO PAPERS?**

LAUREN KIRCHNER

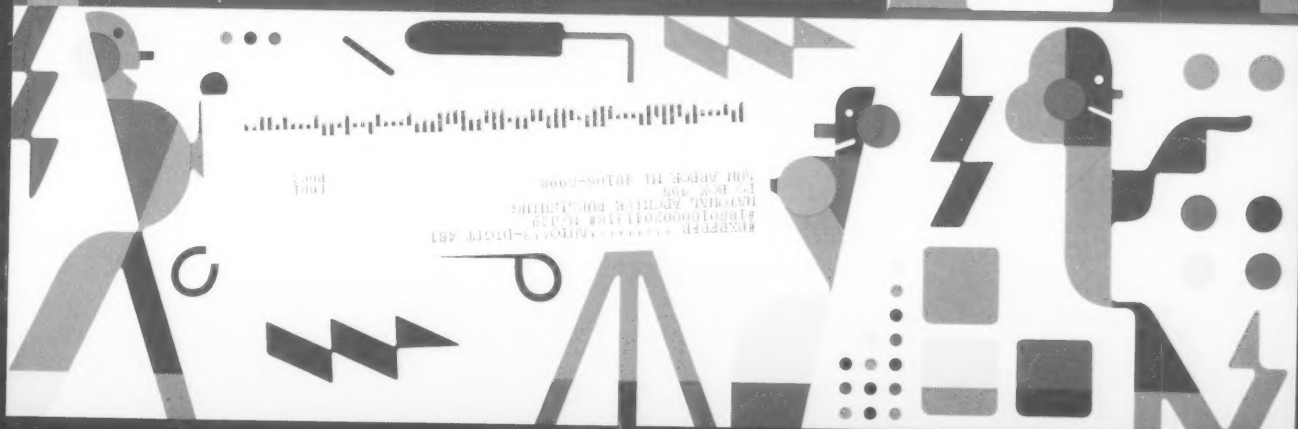
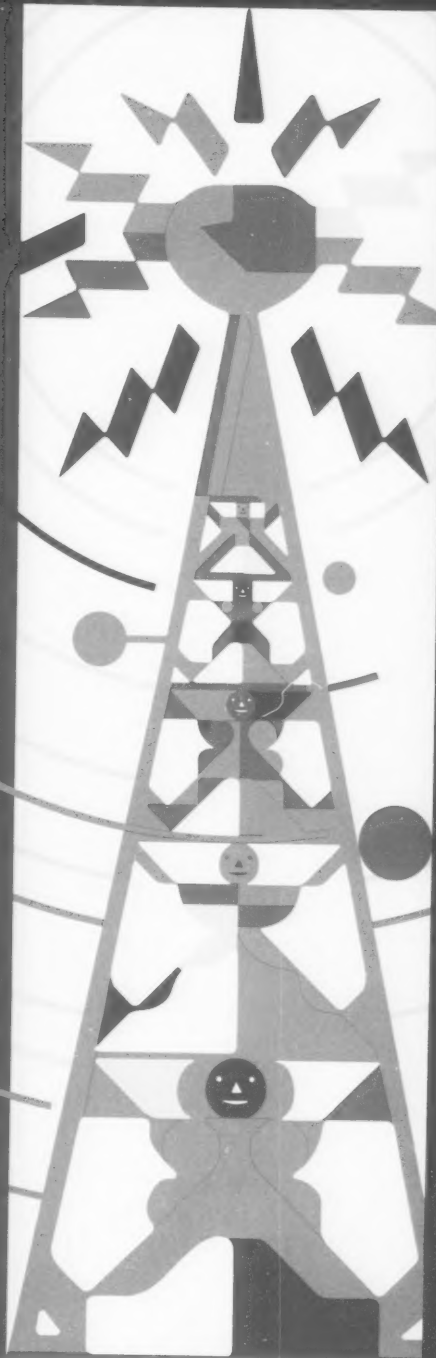
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# COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

July/August 2011

"To assess the performance of journalism... to help stimulate continuing improvement in the profession, and to speak out for what is right, fair, and decent."

—from the founding editorial, 1961



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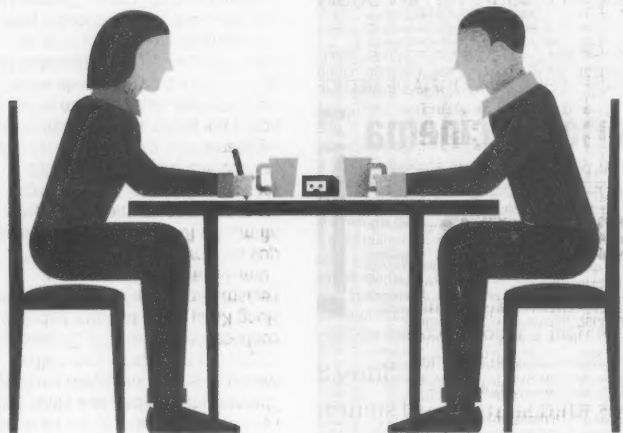
# Opening Shot



**O**MG. It's official, women run the world," wrote Dennis M. Madison, a *New York Times* reader who posted a comment on the newspaper's June 2 web story announcing that Jill Abramson would be its next executive editor, the first woman at its helm. His giddy hyperbole feels right. Despite intense financial pressure, the *Times* remains at the pinnacle of global journalism. Abramson vows to keep it that way. "Our primary function is to create the strongest, deepest, most interesting news report there is in the world," she told Jim Lehrer in an interview on *PBS NewsHour*. She's not a "mistakes were made" leader; she took personal responsibility for not pushing hard enough as Washington bureau chief to publish a story before the second Iraq war about how flimsy the claims of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction were—a serious flaw of enormous consequence. A mother of two, Abramson has proved that she's comfortable enough with her Harvard-educated self and her big-J Journalism credentials to reveal a softer side, for example by writing "The Puppy Diaries" blog, a web series about the intimate happenings of everyday life. But woman or man of whatever pedigree, the *Times* executive editor's mettle will be tested. Abramson would do well to heed the second half of commenter Madison's post: "I hope they do a better job than we did. Good luck." **CJR**

## Ascending

Jill Abramson, left, told *The New York Times* newsroom that she stood on somewhat different shoulders than her predecessors had as she accepted applause after being selected to take over the executive editor post from Bill Keller, center. Abramson named more than a dozen women, including Times Company chief executive Janet L. Robinson, as "my sisters," who helped her rise to the top job.



## The Kitchen-Table Connection

*How to find—and serve—readers beyond Washington*

Toward the end of last year, *The Washington Post's* Lori Montgomery advised her readers that “a surprisingly broad consensus is forming around the actions required to stabilize borrowing and ease fears of a European-style debt crisis in the United States.” That consensus, she reported, had formed around a package of options for cutting the deficit, which included smaller Social Security checks and higher Medicare premiums. But: A consensus

of whom? Beltway opinion makers? Reporters that record what they say? Or the people who repeatedly tell pollsters they don't like such ideas at all? “Poll: Hands Off Medicare, Social Security” (*Wall Street Journal/NBC*); “Poll Finds Wariness About Cutting Entitlements” (*The New York Times/CBS News*). There are reasons and stories behind such polling, which news organizations could and should explore in depth.

One thing they would likely find is a substantial population close to the edge—older women who barely survive on a monthly Social Security benefit of around \$1,100; seniors who struggle to pay more than 30 percent of their medical expenses out of pocket because Medicare doesn't cover everything; fifty-somethings displaced from the workforce and counting the days until they qualify for early retirement, willing to take a 20 percent reduction in their benefits for the rest of their lives. This is not an ideological argument but a journalistic one: readers need context to fairly consider

whatever problems Social Security and Medicare have, and much of it needs to be gathered at America's kitchen tables, not just in Washington.

Back in March, Charles Krauthammer wrote in *The Washington Post* that Social Security was “back-of-an envelope solvable: Raise the retirement age, tweak the indexing formula (from wage inflation to price inflation) and means-test so that Warren Buffett's check gets redirected to a senior in need.” Simple, huh? This is indeed one way to look at it. But the effects of such “tweaks” need to be told in people terms.

This kind of shoe-leather reporting might also impress readers. We live in a time when media folk talk a great deal about engagement, yet there often is a disconnect between them and the broad public they supposedly serve. Stories on how ordinary people earn their money, how they spend it, what they think their economic future holds, can connect. Trudy Lieberman—who covers the coverage of health care and retirement security on [CJR.org](http://CJR.org)—recently interviewed the veteran social-issues reporter Don Barlett about this kind of kitchen-table work (read it at [cjr.org/campaign\\_desk/don\\_barlett.php](http://cjr.org/campaign_desk/don_barlett.php)). When Barlett and his longtime reporting partner, Jim Steele, set out twenty years ago to report on what was happening to men and women who had become victims of one of the first waves of post-war economic restructuring, they spent months talking to people whose jobs were gone for good—flower sellers, fishermen, factory workers who once made shoes. When their series “America:

What Went Wrong?” started up in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, customers lined up around the *Inquirer's* building waiting for a chance to buy the newspaper. What made the series connect? “It brought all the pieces together,” Barlett tells Lieberman. “The public saw themselves in it. One phrase we heard over and over was ‘I thought this was happening only to me.’”

Social Security and Medicare are too important to leave to the elites. Few have the luxury of time that Barlett and Steele did. Yet it's too easy to blame a changing media environment for chaining reporters to their computers. A while back, Deb Schultz, a volunteer at Delaware's ELDERinfo agency, e-mailed Lieberman, asking why there wasn't coverage of the problems her clients face. She invited Lieberman to attend some of her group's counseling sessions during Medicare's open enrollment period: “You'd see a broad spectrum of people and their plights. I wish more reporters and media people would take the time to get this exposure.” Not a bad idea. **CJR**

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# WINNERS



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CTA is proud to honor the winners of the 2010 John Swett Awards for Media Excellence. These awards recognize individual journalists, publications, websites and stations for their dedication to excellence in covering California public education.

**Nanette Asimov**, *San Francisco Chronicle*  
Feature: "Harsh lessons in fiscal reality for UC Berkeley students"

**Sandy Banks**, *Los Angeles Times*  
Feature: "A retired L.A. teacher ponders her rating"

**Hannah Dreier**, *Contra Costa Times*  
News Story: "Recent graduate keeps kids supplied"

**Jill Tucker**, *San Francisco Chronicle*  
Continuous Coverage: Education Issues

**Connie Llanos**, *Los Angeles Daily News*  
Series on a Single Subject/Theme: "Layoffs and budget cuts series"

**Claudia Melendez**, *Monterey County Herald*  
Continuous Coverage: Education Issues

**Rob Rogers**, *Marin Independent Journal*  
News Story: "Pay raises raise fury"

**Neil Gonzales**, *San Mateo County Times*  
Feature Story: "Near perfect"

**Margaret Lavin**, *San Mateo County Times*  
Column/Blog: "Elementary my dears"

**Chris Vongsarath**, *Campbell Reporter*  
Continuous Coverage: Education Issues

**Leslie Layton**, *Chico News and Review*  
Feature: "The new segregation"

**Saratoga News**  
Continuous Coverage: Education Issues

**Dick Sparrer**, *Los Gatos Weekly-Times*  
Column/Blog: "No science fair for my son-- it seems I ate his science project"

**Louis Freedberg**, *California Watch*  
Continuous Coverage: Education Issues

**Kristina Rizga**, *Mother Jones*  
Continuous Coverage: Education Issues

**Anthony Cody**, *Education Week*  
Column or Blog: "Living in Dialogue"

**John North**, *KCLU Radio*  
News Story: "K-12 on the Edge"

**Maria Leticia Gómez**, *KDTV-14 Unision*  
News Story: "Their future is now"

**KTVU-TV**, Oakland  
News Story: "Day of Action, March 4, 2010"

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**Black and White**

Permit me to offer an amplifying note to Pamela Newkirk's trenchant take on the migration of some black journalists (she lists me among them) from mainstream newsrooms to black-oriented news organizations ("The Not-So-Great Migration," *CJR*, May/June 2011).

Since trading a senior writer's position at *Newsday* in 2005 for the gifts and growing pressures of freelancing full-time, I have reported for a dozen or so news organizations, which have been roughly split between mainstream and black-oriented. Like many, I entered journalism, in part, to investigate topics, peoples, communities, that were/are not adequately covered in my hometown newspaper. I'm grateful for editors—of whatever race—who share my sensibilities for what constitutes a fuller scope of news and who pay me to get the story. I appreciate what black-oriented sites, in the main, are doing. And I recognize that it's a double-edged endeavor: to what extent is "black" news on black sites and in black publications being relegated rather than spotlighted as part of the general public discourse? Were the media doing what we're supposed to be doing, would the merits and risks of the current incarnation of black-oriented newsrooms even be up for debate? I share the concern of Newkirk, a former *Newsday* colleague, about who's covering the news, and about the steadily declining tally of non-white mainstream journalists. While I very much agree there's a place for a black news niche, I do wonder where this overall movement is leading.

Katti Gray  
Brooklyn & Monticello, NY

I've spent nearly my entire career in black media, including nearly twenty-five years at *Black Enterprise*. The reason? Mainstream or "white" media couldn't or wouldn't compete for my skills and services. Even when African Americans in their newsrooms were



**The fact that the ratio of PR flacks to reporter hacks has gone from near-parity to almost four to one cannot be spun.**

at their peak, they were still woefully underrepresented. I'm not impressed with all the handwringing by media and newsroom execs about how distressed they are by the loss of African-American journalists and how important diversity is to them. Put your hanky away and compete by recruiting, paying, and offering the opportunities to advancement—all the way to the top—that we've earned and deserve.

Alfred Edmond Jr.  
West Orange, NJ

We need a strong black press as well as great journalists of color in the mainstream. Online publications such as *The Root* have tapped into a niche. Maga-

zines such as *Black Enterprise* and *Essence* have maintained their high quality over the years, while black neighborhood newspapers have struggled for lack of resources and brain drain. Wouldn't it be great to restore some of those publications to their former glory?

Elaine Ray  
Stanford, CA

Now that high-profile African-American journalists have been pushed out of "mainstream" media, black associations are taking notice. This article fails to mention other—not so high-profile—journalists who pointed out this trend ten years ago.

One local news site was started by Ann-Marie Adams, in Hartford, Connecticut. It's now an award-winning news site. She realized she could cover her community better than the other media outlets there. Other black journalists should follow suit—start your own outlet or join others who are using the skills to empower their communities.

Jonathan  
Boston, MA

**Truth and Consequences**

My compliments to John Sullivan for a thoughtful, well-researched article ("True Enough," *CJR*, May/June 2011).

I am a former broadcast journalist turned public-relations consultant, and now run my own firm. I tell a story the same way now as I did when I was in broadcasting. I gather information, determine whether it is worthy of presenting, what is wheat and what is chaff, and publish or broadcast. I make my living in public relations and have for fifteen years, yet I've won awards as the best newspaper/online column writer and radio talk-show host in my market in the last year in head-to-head competition against full-time professional journalists.

It's true that in any information-disseminating role, I operate from a certain

point of view. The decision-making process itself, no matter how an individual applies it, imposes a point of view. The sooner we realize that no information is truly unfiltered or biased unless raw documents or unedited video is posted, the more adept we will be at processing that information.

There is very little difference between *ethical* journalists and public-relations professionals today. Both professions must be more aggressive about policing and calling out unethical practices, whether the egregious “pay for play” phenomenon of buying news interviews on local television or bankrolling front groups.

Gayle Lynn Falkenthal  
San Diego, CA

The central fact—that the ratio of PR flacks to reporter hacks has gone from near-parity to an almost four-to-one advantage for the flacks—cannot be spun. Journalists may not be entirely independent, and we’re not all very good, but one thing about us: we don’t take pay from the people we write about. Even though

doing so would improve our incomes to PR-practitioner levels.

Also, we don’t make excuses for people like Jayson Blair and Stephen Glass. Unlike PR folks who, once in a while “burn” the public via dissemination of a whopper, journalists who do that really are finished. They go to law school or become consultants or life coaches.

Edward Ericson Jr.  
Joppa, MD

#### Pay and Play

John Cook in his essay “Pay Up: Sources have their agendas. Why can’t money be one?” (CJR, May/June 2011) makes an excellent point, as others of us have argued, that the customary rationale for not paying the sources—that the payments will taint the information they provide—is dubious. Paid sources are just as likely to be eager to make sure their information is solid and truthful—in hopes of getting rehired—as they are to tailor it in fraudulent ways to keep the customer satisfied.

Moreover, if the ban is a way to ward off the corrupting effects of payment,

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## CATHRYN CRONIN CRANSTON, 1955–2011



THE COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW IS DEEPLY sorry to report the death of our publisher, Cathryn Cronin Cranston, who lost a fight with leukemia on May 31. Cathy fell ill just days after starting the job at CJR last August and embarked on a series of treatments, including a bone-marrow transplant. In the short time she worked with us, she helped energize CJR’s business and editorial sides. Cathy was smart and vivacious, full of enthusiasm for CJR, and just plain nice to be around. We are mourning what might have been.

Cranston was publisher of the *Harvard Business Review* from 2002 to 2006, and also worked for *The New York Times*, and Mansueto Ventures, the owner of the *Inc.* and *Fast Company* media brands. She was a past chair of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, and had been a consultant to a leading publisher of scientific journals, a global business-to-business publisher, and a leading business school. In a letter to the editor of *The New York Times* responding to a 2003 article about nepotism by Nobel laureate Saul Bellow, she noted that her father, Jim, shared a Nobel prize for physics in 1980. “When it came time to start my career, I was on my own,” she wrote. “Yet my father, consciously or not, sent me out into the world with two guiding principles: maintain the highest standards and ask the best questions.”

“Cathy was a brave, dedicated, hardworking professional with a special vision for CJR,” said Victor Navasky, CJR’s chairman. “She made things happen from the moment she arrived. She was an idealist, but a pragmatic one. Our thoughts are with her family.” She is survived by her husband, Bruce, and two teenaged children, James and Meredith.

—The Editors

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The Audit is run by Dean Starkman, our Kingsford Capital Fellow, with Ryan Chittum, its deputy editor—both former reporters for *The Wall Street Journal*; and with contributions from Felix Salmon of Reuters, and from former Washington Post business editor Martha Hamilton, *CJR's* Audit Arbiter.

The Audit is both serious and entertaining as it critiques the coverage of business and the economy

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it gives a pass to the ways that many sources are already paid in currency other than money—through prominence, enhanced prestige, and the like—and essentially denies the many less-favored sources who aren't in a position to monetize those benefits the only reward that would actually work for them: hard cash.

Still, that doesn't mean routinely paying sources would, on balance, be a good practice. After all, if journalism's objective is to maximize the flow of accurate, publicly significant information, it's hard to argue that making every source interview a sales negotiation would be a lubricant. It would certainly make the work of reporters harder, introduce a whole new legal morass of micro-contract disputes, and would undoubtedly drive up costs. Plus, it's not even clear that it would encourage sources to come

forward. Some might well be deterred by the prospect of being branded as money-grubbing informers.

Edward Wasserman  
*Knight Chair in Journalism Ethics*  
*Washington and Lee University*  
*Lexington, VA*

## Clarification

In Lawrence Pintak's "English Lesson" (*CJR*, May/June 2011), about Al Jazeera English (AJE), we reported that "only viewers in Washington, DC; Toledo, Ohio; and Burlington, Vermont—the three locations where a service provider offers AJE—could watch the channel's Tunisia and Egypt coverage on TV." We should have noted that viewers in other markets could watch AJE programming at times on channels like Mhz Worldview, which rebroadcasts international news programs from AJE and others, but

## NOTES FROM OUR ONLINE READERS

WHEN *NEW YORK TIMES* MAGAZINE EDITOR HUGO LINDGREN POSTED A LIST of "words we don't say" to the magazine's 6th Floor blog (cribbed from Kurt Andersen's list when he was editor of *New York*), we were prompted to ask in our May 24th News Meeting feature on *CJR.org*, Which words would our readers add to Lindgren's list? Here's a sampling of responses:

"Transparency," "strongman" (for a foreign politician that the US doesn't like), "cutting edge," "World Wide Web." —*Reading Out There*

"Game changer." —*Here Come the Innovators!*

"Robust," "love child," "illegitimate," "adult conversation" (when used "ironically" by political morons) and, please God, "iconic." —*Steve Daley*

"Paradigm." Please let this word die a horrible death. —*Carol Ott*

"Canoodling." —*Amy K.*

Any traffic reference: Crossroads, juncture, intersection, turning point. —*Justin -gate. —arturner*

"At the end of the day," "street smarts" (which marks the writer as an urban provincial); in fact, any lazy use of 'smarts' to mean intelligence. —*Mark Richard*

"Going forward," which increasingly, in the temporal sense, is finding its way into "serious" reporting. Aargh!! "Substantive" in place of "substantial." —*M.D. Champ*

"The other side (and 'both sides') of the aisle." —*Ron Moss*

"Tipping point," "going forward," "bloviate," "underwater," "impact" (as a verb), "walking something back," "throwing people under the bus," not SICING childish Republican misuse of the word Democrat. —*David Benson*

"In the coming days and weeks" or "the coming weeks and months." Really? Also, "really?" —*Dov Jacobson*

"Hit the ground running." —*Jim Smith*

"Closure!" —*beth*

"Tapped" for "chosen" or "selected." —*Molly*



that only viewers in those three locations had access to the entire channel as part of their cable package.

### Corrections

In Michael Shapiro's essay "The Paper Chase" (CJR, May/June 2011), we printed: "Their Nubian goat was about to have a calf." The sentence should have read that the Nubian goat was about to have a *kid*. No kidding.

In John Sullivan's "True Enough: The second age of PR," the author

picked up a set of decimal-place errors from the book, *The Death and Life of American Journalism* (which the book will correct in the next edition). The piece should have said, "In 1980, there were about 45 PR workers per one hundred thousand population compared with 36 journalists. In 2008, there were 90 PR people compared to 25 journalists"—instead of the figures .45 and .36 for 1980 and .90 and .25 for 2008. The ratios remain the same. We regret the error. **CJR**

## EDITOR'S NOTE

PRIZES—OH, HOW WE LOVE 'EM! CJR'S JOEL MEARES HAS TAKEN HOME OUR latest: a win in the Best Profile/Digital Media category of the Mirror Awards, given by Syracuse University's Newhouse School of Public Communications to honor the year's best media reporting. Meares won his trophy for a profile of Liz Benjamin, "the frizzy-haired muckraker of New York's statehouse." His profile of Chuck Todd was also a finalist. Justin Peters, our managing editor/web, and Craig Silverman, our Regret the Error columnist, were finalists (respectively, for Best Single Article/Digital Media and Best Commentary/Digital Media). Congratulations to all. Last year, CJR's Dean Starkman took a Mirror home, as did then-CJR person (and still honorary CJR person) Megan Garber.

This part of the year is always bittersweet at CJR, though. Each spring we hire two young journalists from the graduating class of Columbia's journalism school for a yearlong fellowship. Then, a July later, they leave us. So the prize-winning Joel will most likely be on his way back to his home in Sydney soon, where lucky Australians will get to read his journalism. The superb Lauren Kirchner will be leaving, too. We could not have asked for two people with more talent or a stronger work ethic. For an example of Joel's nuanced, intelligent writing, check out his profile of Tucker Carlson on page 38. As for Lauren, read her sharp x-ray of the digital-minded Journal Register Company on page 43, or her graceful Darts & Laurels column on page 15.

Meanwhile, we welcome their replacements: Erika Fry and Alysia Santo. Erika, who is from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, was a reporter for the *Bangkok Post* before J-school, writing features and investigative pieces there between 2006 to 2010. She will replace Joel, covering the press on politics and policy for CJR's Campaign Desk. Before J-school, Alysia was a newsroom intern for three TV stations in upstate New York, her stomping grounds, as well as Global Radio News in London. She'll cover news innovation, replacing Lauren on CJR's News Frontier desk.

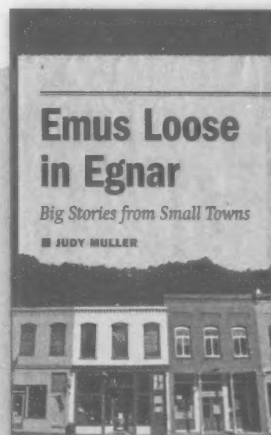
SPEAKING OF THE NEWS FRONTIER, THE REPORT "THE STORY SO FAR: WHAT We Know About the Business of Digital Journalism," which we published in May on CJR.org, is now available in both paperback and as a Kindle e-book from Columbia University Press, via [www.cup.columbia.edu/static/cjr](http://www.cup.columbia.edu/static/cjr), or via Amazon. The illuminating report was written by Bill Grueskin, the academic dean here at the J-school; Ava Seave, a principal at Quantum Media; and Lucas Graves, a Ph.D. student. It provides the most comprehensive analysis to date of the business challenges that for-profit news organizations face in their digital ventures.

Columbia University Press will be publishing several CJR books in the months ahead, and details will be forthcoming. Meanwhile, if you have friends who think and talk about the evolution of journalism, this is a great time to consider giving them a gift subscription to CJR. Or to renew your own subscription. Our fiftieth anniversary issue is coming up, and readers are going to get extra value. I'm just saying.

—Mike Hoyt

"These rural journalists' devotion to truth-telling keeps the First Amendment alive and communities connected in grassroots America."

—Kirkus



### New from the University of Nebraska Press

At a time when mainstream news media are hemorrhaging and doomsayers are predicting the death of journalism, take heart: the First Amendment is alive and well in small towns across America. In *Emus Loose in Egnar*, award-winning journalist Judy Muller takes the reader on a grassroots tour of rural American newspapers and discovers that many weeklies are not just surviving, but thriving.

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# Currents



## *Silence Across the Sinai*

Sometime in late March, at a Cairo protest, a prominent Egyptian activist pretended he was meeting me for the first time, despite our six-year acquaintance. "Military intelligence," he murmured, as he formally shook my hand and brushed past to greet fellow activists. Later, he sent a message through a mutual friend asking that I not contact him again. He was one of several Egyptians who avoided me because I have Israeli citizenship (in addition to my Canadian citizenship) and because my home base was in Israel. ¶ Egypt and Israel have been formally at peace for more than three decades, but relations between the two countries are a complex mixture of cooperation and hostility. Many call it a "cold peace." The Mubarak regime jealously guarded contact with Israel, restricting it to the army, the government, and

powerful businessmen. At the grassroots level, popular discontent with 1979's Camp David peace accords feeds a strong taboo on normal contacts between the two countries; lack of interaction between ordinary people contributes to popular fears and conspiracy theories.

During the anti-Mubarak uprising, activists faced tear gas, water cannons, beatings, and bullets, speaking exultantly of having left fear behind. But less than two months later, they responded to my interview requests with polite refusals, explaining apologetically that a meeting was too risky. Only a handful agreed to speak for attribution to +972, my left-wing Israeli digital magazine.

In post-Mubarak Egypt, the taboo on normalization with Israelis is as strong as ever.

Fear of army intelligence and of social opprobrium were the most common excuses for refusing to be interviewed. The interim military government has stoked an atmosphere of uncertainty with its impenetrable and unpredictable policies. On the one hand, the army arrested and tortured political activists, tried them in closed military courts, and handed down severe jail sentences. On the other hand, they detained and investigated corrupt members of the Mubarak regime, and lifted restrictions on freedom of the press. Did the military council permit contact with Israelis? No one knew, and there was no one to ask. This lack of guidance, combined with a taboo so deep that Egyptians lower their voices or use a code word when talking about Israel in public, reinforced a formidable psychological barrier.

Some refused interviews for ideological reasons. A blogger and prominent labor organizer declined because he was opposed to normal contact with any Israeli, no matter how liberal. An American academic—Jewish and identified with Marxist politics, who divides his time between a US university and an Egyptian academic institution—responded curtly to my e-mail request for contacts in Egypt: "Sorry. I won't help you. You should have told me that you were Israeli."

**'There were so many things going through my head. Should I be getting these people to the back of the store? Should I be taking photographs and reporting the news? Should I be calling my family?'** —Tuscaloosa News photographer Dusty Compton, who shot a widely used picture of a tornado that ripped through Tuscaloosa in April

Under Mubarak, several prominent Egyptian journalists suffered for having contact with Israelis. Hisham Kassem, co-founder of the country's largest independent daily paper, *Al Masry al Youm*, was excoriated for a photograph, published in the state-owned paper *Al Ahram*, showing him sitting by an Israeli journalist at a UN event in Egypt. Hala Mostafa, a former *Al Ahram* columnist, was censured by the Journalists' Syndicate for meeting with the Israeli ambassador.

Both fought back and kept their reputations intact. Mostafa believes that the taboo against normalization will become stronger in post-Mubarak Egypt. Most of the anti-regime activists, she explained, were opposed to normalization. She predicted Israel would become a populist issue with factions accusing one another of being soft on the Zionist state.

But Kassem is impatient with this view. "We are not yet in the post-Mubarak era," he said. The situation in Egypt is still unstable and the military council is merely an interim government tasked with keeping order until September elections.

Kassem is in the process of establishing a new magazine, and has recruited at least one contributor who is an on-the-record advocate of normal contact between Egyptian journalists and Israelis, within a professional context.

—Lisa Goldman

## Kling's Warning

IN 1967, IN EXCHANGE FOR free graduate-school tuition, **Bill Kling** agreed to help Minnesota's St. John's University start a radio station. Today that effort's descendant, Minnesota Public Radio, operates a forty-four-station network heard by more than nine hundred thousand people each week—the largest audience of any regional public radio network. After forty-four years as *MPR's* first and only CEO, Kling stepped down in June, leaving a legacy of aggressive expansion; he launched *American Public Media*, the nation's second largest public-radio distributor and programming producer, and was a founding director of the largest, *NPR*. **Joel Meares** spoke to Kling in April about the role and future of public media. A longer version of their conversation is at [cjr.org/behind\\_the\\_news/klings\\_warning.php](http://cjr.org/behind_the_news/klings_warning.php).

**You say there's a crisis in the media, and that it presents an opportunity for public media.**

We see two key trends: the polarization of commercial media, and in newspapers, this unfortunate continuing decline in revenues. So some kind of strong nonprofit public journalism that serves local communities needs to be available. In many com-

munities, public broadcasting is probably going to be the default alternative, and it's not ready.



### How so?

Its governing structure isn't ready. For instance, there was a grant made to put two public radio reporters in every state capital. It sounds like a good idea except that some of those reporters were working for state institutions—like universities—while trying to report on the state government. It isn't the best circumstance to have the governor able to say to the chairman of the board of regents, "I want that story killed," or "I want the notes."

**You've spoken about a lot more than two reporters—you say mid-sized cities need one hundred reporters and editors in public radio newsrooms. But it took decades for MPR to get to thirty-five reporters and editors.**

The critical timeframe is to be there when there's no one there to do the job and no one to do the job well. Let's

## HARD NUMBERS

**41** percent of the US news media workforce who are women

**23.3** percent of top-level US news media managers who are women

**93** percent of US news companies that have a policy on workplace sexual harassment

**79** percent of US news companies that have a specific policy on gender equality

**125** reporters, cameramen, and crew that CNN assigned to Prince William and Kate Middleton's April wedding

**184** hours that BBC America (which dubbed itself "Home of the Royal Wedding") devoted to documentaries and TV shows related to the nuptials

**65** percent of Americans who said they were "not interested" in the wedding

**280** New Yorker cartoon-caption competitions that were held before film critic Roger Ebert won number 281; he had entered 107 times

**502,416** unique entrants that were submitted to the contest before Ebert's win, entering a total of 1,595,506 captions

**6** ads that were in the April 18 edition of Tina Brown's redesigned *Newsweek*, the only newsweekly whose ad pages were down for the first quarter

**19** percent jump in newsstand sales for Brown's first *Newsweek* from previous year's average; sales were also up for the two issues that followed

Sources: International Women's Media Foundation, *The Wall Street Journal*, *60 Minutes/Vanity Fair* poll, *The New Yorker*, *Business Insider*, *AdWeek*

say the tablet will save the newspaper, they make it through the digital transition, they stop printing, save the distribution costs, save the printing costs, and they get a business model that works. So far they haven't.

**The moment you're talking about is imminent. I don't see how you reach the goal.** I'm disappointed we didn't see it sooner. It was like climate change, there were early signs and a lot of people missed them. I wish we had set up a plan with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. I wish I'd been able to go to Congress and say to them, "I don't care what party you are affiliated with, getting a strong, independent, factual news service ready to serve this country is probably as important as anything you could do." And getting them to fund it at a level that is appropriate—not \$150 million a year, but something closer to a BBC.

**Why hasn't the US been able to achieve what the Brits have in public media?**

It hasn't had a champion. The champion could be a political or a lay leader. Our federal funding in public radio hasn't changed, in real dollars, since 1980. The American State Department put an unknown—but I suspect significant—amount of money into the BBC to help it deal with social media in Libya and Egypt. We seem to be willing to fund getting out the message in the name of democracy throughout the world, but we have forgotten to look at what that means in our own country. We have taken for granted that democracy is a solid ethic of the American people. It won't be if we don't tend to it. **CJR**

## NEWS FRONTIER ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL

Visit [cjr.org/nfdb](http://cjr.org/nfdb)



ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS FACING THE news industry in its search to sustain journalism online is how the models of financially successful national news sites, which have the benefit of higher traffic volume to make up for measly online ad rates, translates to the local level. To help answer this and many other questions about the future of journalism, CJR.org's News Frontier Database has been scouring the country, gathering data and writing original profiles (more than one hundred thirty of them, so far) of both national and local digital news operations.

One profiled organization is Politico, which has become synonymous with national politics through features like Playbook, Mike Allen's agenda-setting morning e-mail, and constant scoops and scooplets on everything Washington. The site, with its print component, has been a financial success and built itself up to legacy-media-sized staff levels, with more than one hundred thirty journalists, and fifty workers on the business side.

But although most have been quick to give Politico the bulk of the praise (and blame) for the new reality of political reporting, it didn't invent the idea. As best we can tell, that distinction deserves to go to a site in Austin, Texas.

Quorum Report began covering Texas's legislature in 1983. Harvey Kronberg bought the newsletter in 1998, made it online-only, and began notching three thousand hits a day—a decade before Politico launched. Readership has only grown, and now it charges subscribers \$325 a year for access to features like The Daily Buzz, a constantly-updating section on the latest legislative maneuverings. Kronberg takes credit for speeding the Texas legislature's pace, for better or worse: "In the last legislative session, we'd send out an e-mail blast. Then, we'd watch [legislators'] phones light up as hometowns got the news." Kronberg launched a sister site, The Texas Energy Report, in April 2009, nearly two years before Politico premiered Politico Pro, its high-priced, niche news service.

Back east, CTNewsJunkie, which itself preceded Politico by two years, is filling a similar role and riding a new surge in traffic after adding a morning e-mail blast in March 2011, inspired by Politico's Playbook, called Morning Coffee & Politics, which tracks Connecticut's political scene. Doug Hardy, the site's business manager, recently quit his newspaper job to focus full-time on building what has already become a must-read for the state's political insiders.

In the case of political news, at least, the question is not if national models can work at the local level, but who will build such sites for states lacking them. It's another thing to watch in the lead-up to the 2012 campaign season.

—Michael Meyer

## LANGUAGE CORNER ALMOST FAMOUS

Write [LanguageCorner@cjr.org](mailto:LanguageCorner@cjr.org)

YOU PROBABLY DON'T WANT TO BECOME "INFAMOUS." BUT YOU MAY WANT TO BE "notorious." The adjective "infamous" has traditionally meant "evil or villainous," as in "the infamous Osama bin Laden." Yet many people, most of them young, have been using "infamous" to mean, as one Urban Dictionary entry has it, "someone who everyone knows, but nobody really likes or pays attention too." ("Too?" Should one take sloppily written definitions seriously?) Other times, it's used just to mean "famous"; one publication refers to "the infamous golden popcorn trophy" given at the MTV Music Awards. Not a touch of evil in that. And no one uses the noun form of "infamous" incorrectly. (Think of "a date which will live in infamy.")

That MTV award, however, may be "notorious," which traditionally has meant simply "widely known." But "notorious" has gained a negative connotation, as in "the notorious child-killer." You can still use "notorious" to mean "famous," but make sure your context makes clear you are not condemning. "Notoriety," the noun form of "notorious," is often just "fame," but is gaining more negative usage, too. As *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage* warns, "it always seems to have a certain piquancy, a certain bite, from its association with persons and things of undesirable character." Be alert to what your readers might infer.

—Merrill Perlman





# Northwestern University in Qatar Welcomes Its New Dean and CEO Dr. Everette E. Dennis

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- Founding Executive Director, Media Studies Center, Columbia University
- Founding President, American Academy in Berlin
- Dean and Professor, University of Oregon School of Journalism & Communication
- Senior Vice President, Gannett and Freedom Forum Foundations
- Advanced fellowships at Harvard, Stanford, East-West Center
- Author, leading books on media industries, digital media, and journalism
- Member, Council on Foreign Relations
- Past President, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication



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By Terry McDermott

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By Alexandra Fenwick

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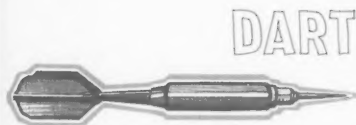
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**COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW**  
**Dumb Like a Fox**  
Fox News isn't part of the GOP; it has simply (and shamelessly) mastered the confines of cable  
By Terry McDermott

**The Kicker** CJR's daily blog last updated: Tue 2:25 PM





**DART** In late 2008, as the world financial system went into collapse, a shocking self-dealing scandal toppled the Anglo Irish Bank. As

Ireland slid into recession, the government nationalized the Anglo Irish Bank and the Bank of Ireland, enacting austerity measures to pay the bill: tax hikes, slashed budgets, and lower pay for state jobs. Middle- and lower-middle-class workers were hit hard; many of them felt an injustice in having to finance the bank bailouts.

One such worker was Brian Condra, a Dublin hospital porter and married father of three. In fact, looking through articles about the Irish financial crisis and the resulting protests, he's hard to miss. "Short of selling our kidneys, we don't know how we're going to [pay our bills]," he told *Bloomberg Businessweek*. "There are people getting their wages capped at a quarter of a million. The only time I have seen a quarter of a million was on a Lotto game show," *The Mirror* quoted him saying. "It's like we drew the lottery ticket made in hell," he told *The New York Times*. "Suddenly we see that the Europe we've bought into isn't a golden utopia."

A quick Nexis search calls up about a dozen articles from Irish, UK, and US outlets featuring Brian Condra since 2009. In many, he is the only quoted source. He is never identified as head of any organization; rather, he is introduced as a typical citizen trying to make ends meet. Who is this eloquent man, and why does he seem to be just about everywhere?

There are two separate articles with the same quote of Condra's—one in the *Irish Examiner* and one in the *Sunday Herald*—about a November 2010 protest in Dublin; the reporters seem to have singled him out from a crowd of 50,000 to sum up what brought people into the streets: "[prime minister] Brian Cowen said three days ago people should pull together, I think he has a neck because he is ripping this society apart," Condra told them. His quotes are so good that they are often used as headlines. "They've ruined my kids' lives" is one; "Santa is going to be very mean this year..." is another.

Two Christmases in a row, he's been featured in strikingly similar pieces about how, as the 2010 take put it, a typical family is "feeling the pinch" at the holiday season. He told a reporter from AFP that he saw similarities between the impoverished Cratchits in Dickens's "A Christmas Carol" and his own family's situation. "We're saying Santa can't bring that much this year. I can't afford it. I have to choose between clothing my children and giving them toys," he said. Earlier that month, his daughter Jill had turned three on the same day the Irish government announced a fresh round of tax hikes. "I'd like to send that present back to [Minister for

Finance] Brian Lenihan with a big bow on it and when he opens it, it explodes in his face."

In Condra's quotes, he hits all the right buttons—health care, mortgages, the cost of raising children—without denouncing or supporting any political party in particular. He helpfully offers specifics—telling reporters exactly how much he and his wife used to bring home each month and how much less they make now. And he gives the pieces real emotional depth as well, by talking about people he knows who have divorced or committed suicide after years of financial strain. In short, he's the perfect go-to guy for reporters wanting to illustrate the effects of the recession in Ireland.

Contacted at home in Drogheda, a port city on Ireland's east coast, Condra says he's never reached out to the media. His role as de facto spokesman for the "average man feeling the pinch" began accidentally, when he showed up early to a protest in Dublin and a reporter for BBC Northern Ireland Radio happened to ask him for a brief interview, merely to be used as a sound check. Impressed by his "gift of gab," as Condra puts it, the reporter put him on air. Later that day, a reporter from BBC London tracked him down for another interview.

Condra says he supposes that his BBC appearances made people think that he "was somebody," because in the next few weeks and months, newspapers, radio, and television outlets from all over Europe were soon reaching out to him—at home, at work, or through his trade union, which had helped organize the protest.

Should one man be relied upon by so many reporters for a requisite splash of color? It certainly couldn't hurt to look a little further to try to get a variety of voices; this **DART** goes to the reporters who didn't.

His sudden fame hasn't pushed Condra to ascend the ranks of the union; he says he's not interested in being a leader or spokesman of any organization. "I think the power in what I have to say resides in the fact that I'm an ordinary person," he says, quite rightly.

It's been two and a half years since his BBC debut, but Condra still gets frequent interview requests. He estimates he's obliged about twenty of them, and turned down many more. The attention is getting a bit old. "I'm actually a private person in my own right, and I don't particularly like having my picture in the paper," he says. He adds that it bothers him that the reporters tend to quote him talking about himself, when he always takes care to emphasize that many people are much worse off, financially, than he. Above all he wishes that more Irish citizens suffering the effects of the budget would speak up for themselves.

Maybe more would, if anyone were listening. **CJR**

## Life Near the Center of the Story

*Istanbul is the 'It' location for enterprising freelance journalists*

LAST SUMMER, MY WIFE BECAME NPR'S CORRESPONDENT IN BAGHDAD. I COULDN'T join her there, so we decided I'd move to Istanbul, with its cobblestoned streets, abundant fresh food, humming nightlife, and gleaming airport.

We weren't the first journalists to discover its charms. At a rooftop party a few weeks after arriving, I encountered some of the other media people based here. A pile of sausage was tended by *New York Times* photographer Tyler Hicks, who gestured with tongs at Ivan Watson, the CNN correspondent. They both covered conflict, same as Dexter Filkins, author of an award-winning book on Iraq and Afghanistan, who lounged on a carpet and cushions. The lights sparkled on the Bosphorus and I watched as Imma Vitelli, an international writer for Italian *Vanity Fair* whose travels take her from Mogadishu to Milan, embraced Peter Kenyon, another Middle East correspondent for NPR. Tipping back a cold beer, I basked in the presence of so much achievement.

As the months passed, I began making friends among another swath of journalists—the freelancers who chased assignments, breaking-news event after breaking-news event. On one hand, it has been exhilarating to see the number of people who thrive doing this; making a living as a foreign correspondent is still the dream of many who enter the profession. But I also see that, along with the thrill and freedom of the freelance life, there comes a lack of job security and free time, and the absence of the kind of on-the-ground support needed for difficult and dangerous assignments.

MONIQUE JACQUES WAS NICKNAMED "PUPPY" BY SOME OF THE JOURNALISTS here when she first arrived in the fall of 2009.

A native of New Jersey, Jacques, twenty-five, has curly brown hair and an excited voice that spills out in a rush. She studied photography at New York University and, in the summer after her sophomore year, snagged a position as an assistant photo editor for the *New York Sun*, before the paper stopped printing. "When everyone went out for drinks, I wasn't yet twenty-one," she recalls, laughing at the memory.

Around that time, Jacques also began working as an assistant for highly decorated photojournalist Lynsey Addario, who in 2009 won a MacArthur Fellowship and who that year also helped inspire Jacques to relocate after graduation to Istanbul. Jacques quickly found mentors among the more established members of the Istanbul press corps. Not long after she landed here, for example, Jacques says she set out on a reporting trip to Kabul—"something I wouldn't have done without help," she adds.

Although she didn't sell any photos from that first trip, it began what Jacques calls her "Afghanistan year." During the spring and summer of 2010, she traveled multiple times to the country, selling photos to, among others, *The Christian Science Monitor* and EurasiaNet.org, a website supported by the Open Society Institute. Her money started to run out in late 2010, making it difficult to travel for work, and she began reconsidering whether Istanbul could work as her base.

She was loath to leave for many reasons, including one very practical one: "Turkish Airlines is fantastic," she says. "They fly to crappy places. There's a direct flight to Bishkek!"

Business began picking up again this year, after protests began to rock Tunisia. She has memories from her weeks in Egypt during the revolution—one involves waiters at a Cairo café killing a giant snake—and she also spent several days with the corps of conflict reporters in Libya. The trips netted sales of photos to CNN, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *The Irish Times*.

No one calls her "puppy" anymore.

Justin Vela, a twenty-four-year-old from California, says he also feels rooted in Istanbul. He sits at my dining room table in a cardigan, sipping tea, telling me about his circuitous route to Turkey. While studying at Evergreen, a college in Olympia, Washington, he cut out for South America, where he continued his



**Where to be** So close and yet so far from the world's biggest news stories

studies and began freelancing for a mix of clients. He was soon filing photos and stories from Venezuela, Colombia, the former Soviet Union, and Finland.

In his first weeks in Istanbul, Vela worked as a copy editor for a corporate publishing outfit. He was at that office on the day in 2010 when nine civilians were killed after Israeli troops in international waters boarded the MV Mavi Marmara, a vessel headed for Gaza. From his desk, Vela says he saw protesters marching down a main boulevard, bound for the Israeli consulate. "I walked out the door with a notebook," he says. Over the next days, Vela contributed reporting to *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and other outlets. "It was my first big story," he says.

As glamorous and adventurous as it might seem on the surface, this pursuit

of stories and a paycheck makes it difficult, Jacques and Vela both say, for freelancers in Istanbul to achieve a reasonable work-life balance. Vela described a recent Saturday off, "a rarity," he says, and a sore point for his girlfriend. Jacques says her busy travel schedule makes romance nearly impossible.

"It's a certain kind of guy who will put up with you being a journalist, and a tough badass," she says.

Still, both Jacques and Vela say they are happy, consider themselves lucky to live in a world-class city, and to be working regularly on important stories. They also both say they cannot imagine living in the United States. Vela told me of the disconnect he felt during a recent visit to California.

"I was looking at the Pacific, and I felt like I was on the edge of the world," he

says. "America is very far away from the center."

FOR OLDER JOURNALISTS IN ISTANBUL, the measure of success is perhaps more nuanced, with the thrill of living in "the center" balanced against the sometimes steady, sometimes frustrating concerns that come, for instance, with having a mortgage. But older freelancers I met with also seem more adept at tailoring their place in the market to meet unique interests and ambitions.

For ten years, Jodi Hilton, who graduated from the University of Missouri's photojournalism master's program, was an accomplished freelance photographer in Boston, making between \$3,000 and \$5,000 a month shooting for clients that included *The New York Times*, Getty Images, and *The Boston Globe*. In the fall

of 2010, having long harbored the dream of moving abroad, she and her husband rented out their condo and traded a stable American life for one in Istanbul.

"It was one thing to be a big fish in Boston," the dark-haired Hilton says, staring into her coffee cup. "I wanted to see what it'd be like to be a fish in Istanbul.... If I didn't try it now, I'd risk never trying."

The last thing Hilton says she sought was a staff job that would root her in a single place, working for one set of editors. From her base in Istanbul, she's planned and executed reporting trips to southeast Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece, and the Italian island of Lampedusa. After so many years of taking assignments in New England from busy news editors in America, she's ecstatic to be making her own choices about where to travel and what to shoot. But after almost a year, Hilton says her typical monthly income is often half the \$4,000 she needs to live comfortably. "I'm less stressed than ever before," she says. "But I should've done this ten years ago."

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## 'Things you see on a global scale play out here every day.'

A second married freelancer, the bearded and ever-smiling Yigal Schleifer, moved to Istanbul in 2002 with a long list of contacts at the classic regional papers in the US. One of his first assignments was in northern Iraq—for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. "That sounds pretty crazy now, right?" he asks.

Almost immediately after he had arrived, these smaller papers began slashing expenses, including cutting back on freelance coverage. The shift was really fast, Schleifer says. Instead of panicking, Schleifer says he saw the changing marketplace as an opportunity. He started hunting for clients who wanted in-depth, unique coverage from Turkey where journalists "could really dive into the stories," he says. His eventual mix of clients—*The Christian Science Monitor*, various Jewish newspapers and magazines, EurasiaNet.org, the German

wire agency DPA—allowed him to focus for years on even the obscure corners of Turkish foreign policy and politics, topics the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* may not have welcomed. (Schleifer recently moved to Washington, DC, where his wife has taken a new job. He continues to cover Turkish foreign affairs.)

MAKING A BARE LIVING PAYCHECK TO paycheck, most of the freelancers I speak to say they are conscious of money but believe passionately that their work is doing good for the people they write about.

Nichole Sobecki, twenty-five, got hooked on the life in Beirut in 2007, where she interned for the English-language newspaper *The Daily Star*. A slim, dirty-blond New York native, Sobecki entered Tufts University in 2004. After her freshman year, she attended a workshop with longtime Associated Press foreign correspondent Mort Rosenblum and VII photo agency co-founder Gary Knight, who suggested Sobecki intern for *The Daily Star*. That's how she made it to Beirut, armed with a Tufts research grant to study Hezbollah.

Nearing graduation, Sobecki heard about GlobalPost, the online news organization co-founded by longtime *Boston Globe* foreign correspondent Charles Sennott. At the time, GlobalPost had approximately sixty correspondents. Sobecki applied for a job and was asked where in the world she wanted to be based. She described meeting at an Italian restaurant with Sennott, who spoke with enthusiasm about under-reported news in so-called "second world" countries like Brazil and Turkey. Sobecki moved to Istanbul in November 2008.

"It took me a year to really get that momentum going," she says. She felt lucky to have the foundation of GlobalPost, which gave her access to a supportive editor and a small, steady paycheck. "I've never missed my rent payment," she says.

GlobalPost typically pays correspondents \$1,000 a month for four stories. Some assignments, such as ones that involve travel to conflict zones, may earn the correspondent more money.

While it is not a staff job with the same pay and perks, Sobecki praises GlobalPost for encouraging her to focus on Turkey, which she considers a significant topic. "Other bureaus have ne-

glected Turkey's story," she says. In the nexus of tensions between the Middle East, Europe, and the United States, Turkey deserves more attention, Sobecki believes. "Things you see on a global scale are playing out here every day," she says.

After her first year in Istanbul, Sobecki says she started to pursue stories beyond the country's borders, not only for GlobalPost, but also freelancing for *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Guardian*. These assignments found her visiting more and more dangerous places, like Libya—the risks of which Sobecki knows well. In March, her boyfriend Tyler Hicks disappeared covering the country's civil war, along with Adario and fellow *New York Times* journalists Anthony Shadid and Stephen Farrell. "I was witness firsthand to what an incredible force the *Times* could be in gathering their resources and doing whatever they could to get them out," she says. The group was released after six days.

I ask Sobecki how, as a freelancer and a GlobalPost correspondent, she resolves questions about her own risks and rewards. In response, Sobecki points out that her Libya replacement, James Foley, was detained in Tripoli for forty-four days before being released. (Another freelancer who disappeared in Libya, Anton Hammerl, is now reported to have been killed.) Sobecki says that Sennott and the GlobalPost staff did "everything" to free Foley. "I feel lucky to have GlobalPost behind me," she says.

I ask her how 2011 is shaping up, with the Arab Spring of revolutions, Japan's earthquake and nuclear disaster, and the killing of Osama bin Laden. She sees it as a test case for her career and for the industry at large. "We've had more news in the last three months than all of 2010," she says.

Multiple, big-news stories are a challenge not just for GlobalPost as an emerging force, but also for larger news organizations, Sobecki says. "Everyone's running to cover stories the way they deserve to be covered," she says, back in Istanbul long enough to pack for a trip to Berlin. "But you never have all the resources you want to tell all the stories you want to tell." **CJR**

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NATHAN DEUEL ([nathandeuel.com](http://nathandeuel.com)) is a writer based in Turkey and Iraq.



## How to Cover the Money Race

*Some tips for 2012 from one of the beat's experts*

IF 2010'S \$3.6 BILLION MIDTERM ELECTIONS ARE ANY GAUGE, REPORTERS TASKED with following the money in campaign 2012 face a tall order: unparalleled millions—much of it untraceable—spent on political communications; new breeds of intentionally opaque advocacy groups jockeying alongside corporations, unions, candidates, and parties to make the most of the ever-evolving patchwork of campaign finance regulations. It is plausible the president could spend \$1 billion on his reelection bid. For reporters, a close familiarity with election law and the tax code would come in handy. Ditto, a sizable investigative team.

To consider how reporters might confront these challenges, **Liz Cox Barrett**, a CJR staff writer who specializes in money and politics, spoke with **Dave Levinthal** this spring, when he worked as communications director for the Center for Responsive Politics and edited its *OpenSecrets* blog. Levinthal, a onetime Dallas Morning News reporter, will leave the center on July 15 to cover the influence beat for Politico.

### **What stories do you wish reporters on the money-and-politics beat would pursue?**

Some of the most interesting stories to be had between now and 2012 will focus on the outside spending that's going to be pouring into races all across the country. In the 2010 election cycle, in the aftermath of the *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* decision, we saw just a flood of money come into the races—four times more than we saw in 2006. All indications are the 2012 election cycle will be utterly unprecedented in terms of this outside spending.

The bottom line is, it's a brand new world for campaign spending of this sort, and reporters have an opportunity to try to track this type of spending, which in some cases is going to be even more than the candidates themselves are spending.

### **The question of Who Spends the Most Money to Influence Elections—Soros or the Kochs, union money or corporate money, Left or Right—seems to take up a lot of air. Is it overemphasized by the media, to your mind?**

The challenge is to go beyond the numbers. If you're just reporting that X group spent X amount of dollars in X state and offer no more, no context, no sense of what this is doing to the nature of the race, to the conversation in the race, then such stories can be a little thin and not necessarily provide the electorate with a whole lot of useful information. What people need to know is who candidates are being supported by, who their political brethren are, who's opposing them—and why. Why is often the biggest question of all. Why would some big national group want to involve itself in a congressional election in northern Idaho or southern Alabama?

### **You are a go-to source for all manner of money-and-politics stories. What are the most frequently asked questions?**

The campaign finance landscape at the federal level ranges from confusing to confounding. We get a lot of questions just about who is able to raise what, how much, what types of groups have to disclose their donors and don't have to disclose their donors, whether candidates have the right to use money in certain regards or not in others. At the federal level—and the same at state and local—depending on who you are and what you are and what you're using your money for, the rules can change wildly.

I like to tell the story of how we sat on the phone with *The New York Times* trying to pin down all the different permutations and spending limits and disclosure rules for all different types of groups at all different political levels. It took five or six of us numerous hours to produce a painstakingly detailed flow chart that ran in the *Times*. Here we are with one of the best newspapers in the world and it's taking us an incredible amount of time to produce something that is not going to be completely impenetrable for the average reader. We were just about banging our heads against a wall. And that doesn't even count the calls we made to campaign lawyers and others to double- and triple- and quadruple-check our work.

### **Now, in a time of campaign finance deregulation, what are the biggest obstacles to following the money (both tracking the money—how much, from where, to where—and tracking the effects of the money)? What makes this a tough beat?**

For candidates, you're able to see any donations more than \$200 through our website. We break down those donations in various ways so you can see whether a certain industry is playing an outsized role in funding or supporting a candidate. We track about a hundred and twenty different industries and special-interest areas; we assign a code to every reportable donation that is made to any federal-level candidate. So if a VP of Chevron makes a donation to John Boehner or Nancy Pelosi, we'll be able to say that a contribution from someone who works in the oil-and-gas

industry went to Pelosi or Boehner. Now, multiply that by thousands and you see all the different candidates and all different types of money from these one hundred twenty different industries.

On the other end, go back to the brave new world, the widened avenue of outside money. These types of organizations that now exist—527 groups or super PACs or traditional PACs or not-for-profit entities or the types of political entities that can make independent expenditures—in some cases you can find out their donors. In many cases you cannot.

If you're trying to find out who is raising money in order to air TV ads in a particular Senate or congressional race, if it is a not-for-profit organization then they don't, by law, have any requirement to disclose their donors. So if \$500,000 worth of TV ads has been bought up in your congressional district by a group called Americans For Peace, Love, and Joy and they're a 501(c)(4) and they're slamming the heck out of one candidate or lovingly promoting one candidate and you ask yourself the question, "Well, who's funding them?" There's no way to find out. That's just the way the law reads at this point.

**As you've touched on, one ongoing challenge is keeping readers' attention, given the complexities involved. Any advice there?**

Local is key. Can you go beyond the numbers and really tie those dollar figures to political movers and shakers, to people who may have prominent roles in your community, to political bank-rollers? Then you have the material to begin asking questions. Why? What's in it for them?

Those types of stories have multiple dimensions to them. You go beyond the horse race story to delve into the realm of payback. At the end of the day, if someone gets in a position of power, often his or her backers are going to come calling. The people with the thickest wallets can have the greatest sway or, at the very least, the greatest access to the politicians they've been backing.

Conversely, if you see some national groups or groups that don't have a logical stake in a political race in a certain part of the country, that should raise a

red flag for reporters. Use the money not as a reporting end in itself, but as a bridge to ask deeper questions about the role of special interests in elections.

**Any predictions for what the top stories of 2011 and 2012 might be?**

Absolutely. First on the list is the outside spending and how so many races in the country stand to be notably affected, if not dominated, by it. The presidential race stands to be the most expensive in US history, and the congressional races stand to be incredibly competitive; people with political money to spend will have that much more of an incentive to make a bet.

Also: the potential decline or even death of the public presidential fundraising system. Since Obama opted out of it in 2008 and most assuredly will do the same in 2012, special interests that push for public financing of federal campaigns may be in a more marginalized position than they have been before, particularly if Republican candidates also eschew public funding to raise and spend unlimited sums.

**What do you make of the recent news that the IRS might begin collecting gift taxes on some big donations to nonprofit advocacy groups, the sorts of groups that have spent millions of anonymous dollars on political ads?**

It's emblematic that the landscape is in total flux. If the IRS does what the IRS says it's going to do, it could turn off some big-dollar donors from actually making these sorts of donations. After standing on the sidelines in regard to this type of political activity, the IRS is showing some sort of willingness to inject itself into the process a bit more. Donors will have to, potentially, pay for their anonymity. If you want to make a big donation to this sort of an outside spending group, then what the IRS is effectively saying is, "We're going to enforce charging you a tax for that."

**Looking back, what did reporters on the money-and-politics beat do well during the 2010 election? What stands out?**

Generally, the coverage of the very turbulent, almost month-by-month changing nature of outside spending in the aftermath of *Citizens United* was excellent.

There were some reporters who took great pains to explain exactly what was going on—a more than Herculean task. Everyone was effectively having to earn their amateur election law degrees in order to understand this stuff.

**What were some holes or shortcomings in the coverage?**

If you don't invest the time to really understand the new rules and regulations, it is going to be harder to report on this in a worthwhile way and you open yourself to inaccuracy. You absolutely have to understand this very well in order to have any shot of explaining it in a clear way to a general readership—or even a specialized readership. It just takes a lot of time to build up the requisite knowledge. Do it now while you've got the time when things are not nearly as harried as they are going to be once the debates and the Iowa caucuses and the primaries heat up.

**Last year American University cited OpenSecrets.org as a key player in "the new journalism ecosystem," along with nonprofit news outlets like ProPublica and MinnPost. You've traditionally been known as a place that generates data "enabling" good journalism. Are you now focusing as much on producing journalism of your own? Why?**

The core of what we're doing is always going to be centered around our research. Without that, we can't help people, we can't help journalists do their work, and we can't produce anything of great value on our own. In recent years we've put added emphasis on doing our own aggressive journalism in the public interest. It's something we're really proud of. Increasingly, we're partnering with news organizations, sometimes to run our stories in their entirety for free in their newspapers.

At the end of the day, our mission is to explore as deeply as we can and enlighten people as much as we can about the role money plays in politics. We see this as a next logical step for us in order to achieve what's always been our mission, but in a media environment that has changed dramatically just in the past five years. We want to reach people where they're looking for their information. **CJR**



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## The Story So Far

*What We Know About the  
Business of Digital Journalism*

A REPORT BY

Bill Grueskin  
*Dean of Academic Affairs, Columbia Journalism School*

Ava Seave  
*Principal, Quantum Media  
Adjunct Associate Professor, Columbia Business School*

Lucas Graves  
*Ph.D. Candidate, Columbia Journalism School*

Can digital journalism be profitable?

What is making money?

What is *not* making money?

Why?

Bill Grueskin, Ava Seave, and Lucas Graves address these questions in a major new work that explores the financial state of digital journalism.

Based on several months reporting on-site at news organizations, *The Story So Far* provides the most comprehensive analysis to date of the business challenges news organizations face with their digital ventures. The authors also offer a series of recommendations of how news organizations can more effectively embrace the unique attributes of the Internet to generate more revenue.

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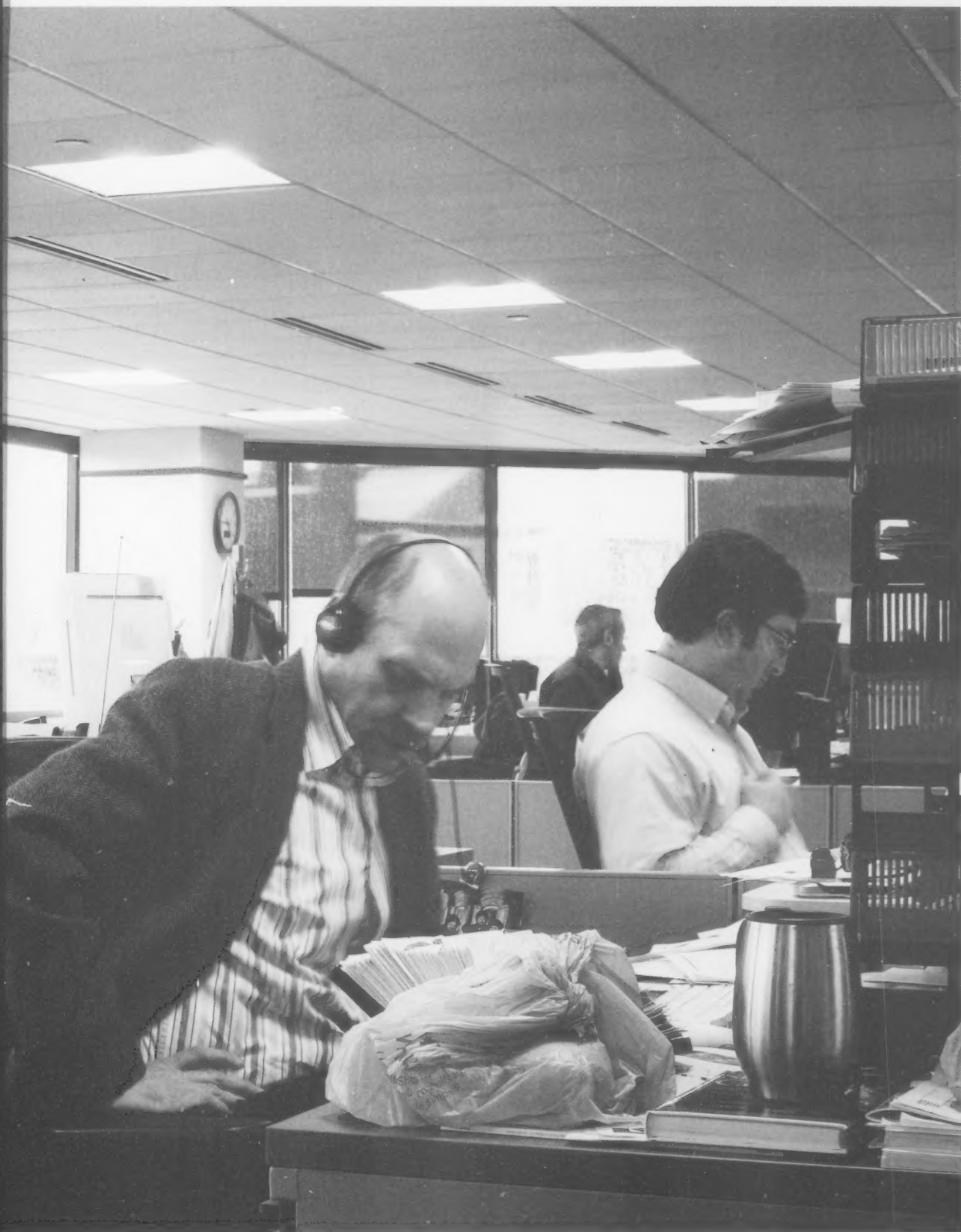
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**THE AMERICAN NEWSROOM** SEAN HEMMERLE







# Can Public Television News Step Up?

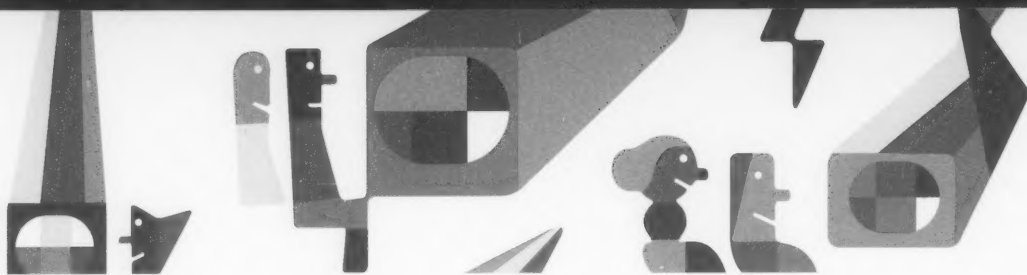
Television has long been our most popular news medium, the format that unites us and brings the world to our living rooms each night. Public television news is cherished by many in America, even though—resource-starved, politically beaten, and reportorially unambitious—it has always danced a step behind.

In the following pages, we try to envision what public television could be, in an era in which we desperately need it to be more than it is.

- On page 26, Emily Bell, a newcomer to America, considers what she senses is missing in US media: a place to go when big things are happening. She misses the BBC, the UK's national campfire, but also understands why the US won't get one, and what realistic possibilities do exist. Bell, the former director of digital media for *The Guardian*, runs the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.
- On page 29, Lee C. Bollinger argues that just as regional institutions, including the press, necessarily evolved into national ones, national institutions must go global to meet the needs of our time. He argues for an "American World Service," a publicly funded US news outlet for the global age. Bollinger is the president of Columbia University and the author of *Uninhibited, Robust, and Wide Open: A Free Press for a New Century*.
- Finally, on page 33, Elizabeth Jensen examines the DNA of local public television stations, which some people hope can help fill a yawning information gap by increasing their hunger and capacity for news. But in her examination of public TV culture, Jensen doesn't locate many journalism genes. Jensen covers public broadcasting for *The New York Times*.

We hope you find these three perspectives illuminating.





## Signal and Noise

*Trying to follow global news in America, a newcomer finds that something is missing*

BY EMILY BELL

If you wished to see a vivid illustration of how the broadcast news media in the US are perceived in 2011, you could do worse than watch President Obama tell jokes.

At the White House correspondents' dinner he delivered a left and a right, so to speak. First, he played his "official birth video," a clip from Disney's animated *Lion King*. "That was a joke," he enunciated at the table for Fox News, the network that has facilitated "birther" rumors that the president was born in Kenya. Then he looked around the glitzy gathering to find National Public Radio: "You guys are still here?" he quipped, referring obliquely to congressional thundering against continued public funding for the network, adding, "I was looking forward to new programming like *No Things Considered*..."

That's about it in a nutshell. On one side, successful commercially funded entities that are popularly characterized as having abandoned high-quality reporting for ratings, one way or another, to one degree or another. On the other side, a public media system with a highbrow reputation but a political mountain to climb to maintain the public portion of its funding.

And somehow the two parts are not greater than the whole. America lacks a central voice in terms of both reporting itself to the world and the world to its diverse citizens. This puts the country at a disadvantage. The quality of its democracy suffers, as does its global image.

In the first two weeks of March, when I began working on this article, the news media in the US had two very different unfolding protest stories to follow. One was the latest wave of the Arab Spring, which rolled into Bahrain that month and met violent resistance from the authorities. The other uprising, less violent but similarly newsworthy, was taking place in Madison, Wisconsin, where Republican Governor Scott Walker's union busting "budget-repair bill" hit a wall of public workers and Democratic senators fled the state in an attempt to hold up its passage.

As an avid consumer of news, and as someone who is relatively new to the US, it was striking and a little disconcerting to find out how hard it was to follow either narrative arc contemporaneously through the mainstream media. I remember a particular evening in mid-March when Twitter alerted users to the fact that both #Bahrain and #Wisconsin were "trend-

ing," yet it was impossible to find comprehensive coverage of either story. Cable news did not break its schedule to bring the news instantly; the *New York Times* website, normally a source of wide-ranging news, was slow to update; on the radio, NPR made clear that it is not a twenty-four-hour service. All outlets eventually carried some coverage of both stories, of course, but locating information about events in Madison and Manama as they unfolded in real time was difficult.

Back in Britain, when momentous events were unfolding, I would switch on the BBC, or click on its website, confident that I would be able to find a broad, if sometimes shallow, impression of what was going on in the world. The BBC is omnipresent in the UK—an all-encompassing news website, eight national TV channels and ten national radio channels, dozens more local and international channels, outlets on each platform dedicated to breaking news. In the US, I seem to have no such go-to broadcast news source when big stories break. Like what I expect is an increasing number of people, I find myself reliant on social media feeds. Is this a problem at all? Is it a problem for Americans?

THESE DAYS, MY DEFAULT POSITION FOR BIG STORIES IS TO follow the stream of aggregated news from multiple sources—Facebook and Twitter, as well as search engines like Google News. Here, links from domestic sources such as CNN blend increasingly with international coverage from convergent news organizations, such as the BBC and Al Jazeera English, which reach wide audiences with web and broadcast platforms far outside their domestic markets.

The web is increasing audiences for news, but growth is often outside domestic markets and not supported by proportionate advertising increases. Those who benefit most from this situation are often the news organizations that have funding models that allow a concentration on editorial firepower and reach, in terms of how many million visitors see a story, rather than revenue. And predominant among that group are often state and publicly funded media entities.

This is not surprising. In a world in which international news is holding the interest of audiences more frequently, the ability to publish and broadcast news pan-nationally is hugely advantageous. And without a reliance on advertising or subscription, editorial focus becomes paramount. For commercial outlets, speed is a function of being com-

EMILY BELL is director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.



petitive, but resources for producing content are under pressure. So large appealing advertising audiences are more often anchored to big name talk shows, which are more reliable in terms of generating revenue, than to streams of events, which by their nature are unpredictable.

In this trans-national world, it is unclear what the American proposition is to the international market.

In a recent speech, Peter Horrocks, director of the BBC World Service, addressed America's problem as he discussed a new era of government investment in global media: "There is an explosion of state-funded international news at the same time as there is a dramatic cutting back in resources by most commercial news organizations," Horrocks said in a keynote speech at the International Journalism Festival in April. He pointed to China's \$7 billion expansion program for its overseas media operations, "including an increase in foreign bureaus for its global English news channel CCTV, from nineteen to fifty-six over the next three years." He could have pointed to others as well: Russia Today is stepping up investment; Qatar-based Al Jazeera is similarly looking for international expansion.

CNN remains America's predominant news channel overseas, with a reach that exceeds 260 million homes around the world through CNN International, a very distinct news service from the CNN accessed in another 100 million US homes. CNN is the US equivalent of the BBC for reach and profile, but as part of Time Warner, its future is dependent on shareholders and the marketplace.

And domestically, CNN is in a dogfight with competing networks, notably MSNBC and Fox News. The economic necessity to be able to prove that a network is holding steady "audience share" works in favor of personality-driven schedules. Hence the investment in faces such as Piers Morgan and Anderson Cooper, to pit against MSNBC's Rachel Maddow and Fox News's Bill O'Reilly. This competition in the network's home market draws heavily on management's time, focus, and resources.

I asked Horrocks to expand on his remarks in an e-mail exchange. "Could the BBC be invented now for the USA?" Horrocks asked, rhetorically. "Of course not. Could its currently publicly funded media be made to operate more seamlessly and effectively? Of course." As Lee Bollinger does in more detail—in the next article in this CJR package—Horrocks described the messiness of a US system in which the key overseas state-funded broadcasters, such as Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, Radio Free Asia, and Alhurra, are prohibited by law from rebroadcasting into its domestic market. "The lack of consolidation is a fatal flaw," Horrocks said. "There have been some noble efforts but it is still utterly Balkanised."

And there are consequences to that. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently employed the notion of Al Jazeera "winning"—with its coverage of the Middle East—as a stick to poke US domestic media, framing this soft power struggle as a policy issue.

Still, what was interesting and illustrative to me about trying to find news in the US is that the system works exactly as it is designed to work. It is highly pluralistic and market-

driven, meaning that with news in particular there is not one canonical version of events. In speaking to a number of academics, executives, and media policy researchers, the same phrase occurs again and again in describing the US public media system: "designed for weakness."

THE HIGHLY DECENTRALIZED NATURE OF US PUBLIC MEDIA was always intended in part to ensure that state-funded media did not reach the levels of dominance scaled by the BBC.

This is very much the main point of the monograph *Nixon and the Politics of Public Television* by David Stone, which is being republished this fall by the New America Foundation as part of its Media Policy Initiative program. Stone, now executive vice president of communications and public affairs at Columbia University, wrote the original paper almost thirty years ago, but the fierce antipathy Richard Nixon's administration showed toward public broadcasting, following Lyndon Johnson's creation of the system with the 1967 Public Broadcasting Act, is remarkably similar to the contemporary pressures faced by the entities that law cre-

About the US public media system, one hears 'designed for weakness.'

ated—public media's main funding body, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and its main beneficiaries, TV's Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and National Public Radio (NPR).

Since I come from the UK, where the BBC has been the culturally dominant force for more than seventy years, the idea that there is not one outlet dedicated to telling the whole nation what is going on in the world right now is disorienting. But to US audiences, many of its politicians, and even many of its journalists, the idea that your dominant media authority would be publicly funded is the very vision of a dystopian horror.

In the past, such cultural differences have been interesting but not much more than that, because these outlets operated pretty much in isolation. It took television technology more than fifty years before the market was ready for international TV services. Until CNN International's arrival in 1985, five years after CNN's birth, news channels on television operated for their domestic audiences only. The BBC only extended its international TV reach after that, in 1987, with the stuttering start of BBC TV Europe, which became part of BBC World in 1991.

Then came the Internet in the mid-1990s. In addition to upending the financial model to support news, the global interconnectedness of the Internet as a delivery system has also had the effect of creating a new global market. Citizens can converse and consume beyond their borders, and news

organizations can transcend previous formats and licensing arrangements to reach much bigger international audiences. Just as the revenue opportunities are shrinking, so the opportunities of reach are expanding. And again, some advantage goes to state-funded media, which do not have to worry as much about revenue and can focus on content and distribution.

In the US, the lack of a clear path toward funding what has been called "accountability journalism" has triggered a number of suggestions that the country should rethink its resistance to publicly funded media. In 2009, Leonard Downie Jr., the former executive editor of *The Washington Post*, and Michael Schudson, a Columbia Journalism School professor and CJR contributor, wrote a report, published here in CJR, called "The Reconstruction of American Journalism." Among several recommendations was one that public funding for journalism be increased, via the Federal Communications Commission, which would contribute a portion of its fees from telephone networks, broadcast licenses, and spectrum auctions to create a new Fund for Local News. It also recommended a more consolidated approach toward distributing funding through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, giving larger sums to fewer recipients, and suggested that this body change its name to the Corporation for Public Media.

The same year, Princeton professor Paul Starr, testifying before the Congressional Joint Economic Committee during a hearing on "the future of newspapers," called for more government support of journalism, holding up as encouraging the example of public broadcasting, which he said "has become an important source of news and public-affairs discussion."

But two years later, for those who had hopes that a serious discussion about public funding for the press would arrive, the world has moved backward. As most readers know, NPR has suffered through a plethora of public controversies this year (Juan Williams, Ellen Weiss, James O'Keefe, et al.), culminating in the resignation of NPR's president and chief executive, Vivian Schiller. A week later the House of Representatives voted to strip NPR of its government funding, though the measure is expected to fail.

Even in the UK, political pressure on the BBC is forcing its director general to attempt cutting costs by 20 percent. The big difference between the UK and the US, though, is the scale of the funding. In the UK, a license fee charged to every TV-owning household in the country raises more than \$5 billion a year for the broadcaster—this from a domestic market roughly a fifth the size of the US. In the US, the total amount the CPB distributes to the public broadcasters is just around \$400 million per year, which in turn is split between NPR, PBS, and many local affiliates.

In the US, PBS and NPR receive a mere \$9.37 per capita in revenue, counting all sources of revenue—federal funding, donations, and sponsorships. That compares to \$116.43 per capita in the UK and \$54.03 in Japan, according to a recent report by the media advocacy group Free Press.

But the argument that the US compares poorly in its state and public investment in media is not one that gets much traction in the US. And many Americans do not think that the

The 'soft power' struggle in the world has begun a new phase.

decentralized system operated here is necessarily a disadvantage. Even some of those involved in public broadcasting see decentralization as a plus. "The fact that NPR has zero control or authority over affiliate stations is not necessarily a bad thing," says Schiller, the former NPR chief, now the chief digital officer of NBC News. "Independence of ownership is often a strength as these stations are closest to their audiences."

Schiller is skeptical that there will ever be more public support for funding for public media than there is at the moment. "I just don't see it," she says. "Even journalists who work inside public media are conflicted about taking public dollars."

Yet while public media may struggle for funding, it is having no trouble finding audiences. Schiller's time at NPR might have ended with a series of controversies, but her two-year tenure saw a continuing growth in audiences and a focus on digital innovation. And at a time when the normal trajectory for 'legacy media' has been at best static, NPR's figures have increased to around 27 million people listening to at least one NPR show a week, up from around 13 million in the late 1990s. Similarly, PBS claims a monthly reach of 117 million and an online monthly reach of 20 million.

Bill Clinton set public-media-advocate hearts aflutter in May, when he suggested an American or international entity, similar to "NPR or the BBC," that would put out unspun truth and debunk Internet rumors. But privately, even those at the top levels of public broadcasting feel that this is unlikely.

WHAT MAY BE MORE LIKELY IS THAT A NEW ECOSYSTEM could spring out of current networks of professional and amateur news organizations, using the cheap or free infrastructure of the Internet to create traction.

Tom Glaisyer, a Knight Media Policy Fellow at the New America Foundation, for example, envisions the emergence of a connected world of public service publishing based around libraries, community groups, and journalism schools, many of whom are already active participants in publishing to local communities. Such a vision relies on the idea that the majority of newsgathering will fall to more dispersed sources, some of them professional journalists and many of them not. "These will be new information institutions, and look very different from what we had in the past," says Glaisyer. Context and analysis might as easily come from experts in the field publishing their own material as from news organizations.

We certainly got a glimpse of the ability of the Internet to facilitate and integrate news sources, and maybe of a new news ecosystem, during the Arab Spring and the Japanese earthquake and tsunami this year. Whether it was NPR's own

head of social media strategy, Andy Carvin, ceaselessly tweeting links of disparate sources and coverage of the Middle East for months on end, or MIT's nuclear science and engineering students blogging the post-earthquake problems with the Fukushima power plant ([mitnse.com](http://mitnse.com)), we could begin to see how such an ecosystem might work. Investment in professional journalists—to follow sources and subjects even when they are not in the public eye, to investigate and stand up to governmental and corporate pressure, to help sort the fake from the real—will still be needed, but the money currently spent on maintaining bureaus and infrastructure is almost certain to shrink—at least in America.

This need was made clear in the recent FCC report, "The Information Needs of Communities," published in June. But meanwhile, the increased and rapid investments by many other governments into centralized media will continue to be a challenge to the US. The "soft power" struggle in the world has begun a new and more political phase, and globalized news has increasing relevance to domestic markets. People and money move ever more fluidly across borders, so information about an earthquake in Japan, an explosion in Russia, or a riot in Tehran becomes directly relevant to a viewer in the US or a listener in Europe.

In this new world, the US is undoubtedly a leader at least in one way. The US has a more powerful media platform than any of its rivals, through technology companies like Facebook, Google, and Twitter.

It is somewhat ironic then, that the journalism distributed via these networks will be increasingly generated by non-US sources. To many, this might seem like a blessed liberation from the pervasive Americanization of culture through the likes of MTV and CNN in the heady days of cable expansion. But one can see why Hillary Clinton talks about other countries "winning" the information war, and why this might be of concern to the US.

News journalism will come through these free, commercial, private platforms as much as through any other means, including the broadcast channels of old. In this respect the future of public media is already here. It is networked and highly dispersed.

But in another way, it still feeds on the ability of individuals and organizations to present reports and perspectives, to motivate debate and action. And in that realm, it is unclear what the US national news identity might be, or how it might be funded.

It may be that the notion of the cross-national news brand, such as the BBC, is outmoded, but this seems a premature and quite possibly wrong conclusion. Signal is needed above noise, and professional journalists at their best should be about signal.

What is clear is that in a world where the rapid deployment of news has widespread impact but limited economic value, to stick rigidly to the idea that the market will provide for it is a high-risk strategy. **CJR**



## News for the World

*A proposal for a globalized era: an American World Service*

BY LEE C. BOLLINGER

I would be surprised if in future decades, people did not say that the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first was the period in which the shape of the modern world was determined, and that two primary forces did most of the shaping: the spread of capitalism and free market economies, and the invention of new technologies of communication.

We live as never before in an interdependent and integrated world economy. Nearly half of the revenues of the S&P 500 corporations are generated from business conducted outside the United States; developing countries provide roughly half of the manufactured goods bought by developed countries (up from 14 percent in 1987); approximately half of the US government's debt is in foreign hands; and, on a more personal scale, a significant portion of everyone's retirement fund is invested in foreign enterprises. The days have passed when America's demand for energy in the world market was

so large, relative to other nations, that it determined the price of oil we consume.

At the same time, the ability to communicate and to have access to information, knowledge, and opinion has taken a giant leap forward. Billions of people across the planet have some degree of access to the Internet. Global media outlets are proliferating, with newer entrants such as Al Jazeera, CCTV, and France 24 joining traditional international institutions such as the BBC and CNN. Meanwhile, the websites of *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and Reuters are garnering tens of millions of monthly visitors. When *The Associated Press* publishes an article it can reach several billion people.

LEE C. BOLLINGER is president of Columbia University and author of *Uninhibited, Robust, and Wide-Open: A Free Press for a New Century* (Oxford, 2010). This article is adapted from a September 2010 lecture delivered by Bollinger at the University of Illinois College of Law. A previous version was published in the *University of Illinois Law Review*.

The consequences of globalization are both good and bad. Certainly, the most notable benefit is lifting hundreds of millions of people out of lives destined for poverty and sickness, and diffusing basic wealth and well-being. This is, by any measure, a great good. We also have practical reasons for being happy about it as well: Our prospects for a full recovery from the Great Recession over the next five to ten years depend significantly on the creation of wealth in emerging economies, to make up for the decline in demand from the American consumer. And the positive facets of globalization are far more extensive than these economic benefits, affecting as they do our broader appreciation of the vast variety and intrinsic interest of the human condition. Without this appreciation, we are more susceptible to distorted ideas about what other people are like and more apt to remain dangerously uninformed about, for instance, what the Chinese are thinking, or what is driving young people in the Middle East and North Africa. Engaging the world remedies this ignorance.

We also know that globalization does not spread its consequences only benignly. We face a host of problematic and vexing issues, too, as a result of globalization. Many are notorious: the rise of violent extremism among populations threatened by modernity; the potentially catastrophic consequences of climate change; the depletion of the earth's natural resources; the degradation of the environment; the growing divide between rich and poor; and the list continues.

To realize the enormous positive potential of globalization—to channel it, regulate it, and encourage it in the right ways and to grapple with its manifold problems—will require many things. Among the most important is ensuring that the world has the institutions necessary to accomplish what we need. Institutions—political and civil—are central to the structure of any society, including an emerging global society.

Two such institutions are the university and the press. Both are concerned with providing objective and accurate information, ideas, and analyses that we need in order to understand and act in our world. The press is more concerned with grasping the here and now, the current state of things. We, in universities, generally are more concerned with taking our time and trying to see matters in a larger context. Obviously, there are differences, but the journalist and the scholar are more similar than not, and, importantly, are both motivated by a desire to serve the public good according to certain professional standards.

This comparison helps to highlight certain features of the press that are important and relevant to the new world. In the United States, the Supreme Court has played a major role in articulating the special role a free press can play, focusing primarily on political and social benefits. The press is part of the marketplace of ideas through which we seek to understand our world and find truth. It also serves the needs of citizens in exercising their sovereign responsibilities. It does this by exposing the misdeeds and errors of government, and by informing us more generally about the issues we must face and resolve. Collectively, the press is our national public forum.

Now, with globalization well underway, it is imperative that we begin to think more systematically about how we

will build and develop the concept of a free press for a new global public forum.

This is part of a larger historical process. Authority and structures related to authority have to shift as human activity changes. This happened throughout the last century in many areas of the society. When the US economy went from a collection of mostly local and regional affairs to a national system, policymaking and regulation had to shift accordingly.

Today, censorship  
anywhere chills speakers  
everywhere.

One example is our central banking system. Established in 1913, the Federal Reserve System was organized to provide twelve regional banks with the authority to deal with what was then a set of regional economies. But in the ensuing decades, as the economy became national in scope, a more centralized banking authority was needed, and the powers of the Federal Reserve Board in Washington grew accordingly.

WE CAN SEE THE SAME PROCESS UNFOLDING OVER THE twentieth century with respect to the First Amendment and the constitutional rights of freedom of speech and the press. As the issues faced by the nation became more and more national in reach, in part because of the growth of a national economy, and as the technologies of communication facilitated a national discussion, the power of local communities to set the balance between a free press and other societal interests (like reputation, privacy, offensiveness, and so on) became intolerable. Censorship anywhere effectively constituted censorship everywhere, since speakers in the new national forum would naturally be inhibited by local censorship. This was one of the great insights of the Supreme Court in *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*, which nationalized the rules with respect to defamation laws throughout the country.

As we move toward more global systems, a similar evolution needs to occur. We have the technological capacity for an effective global discussion led by a vibrant press, but two critical elements are missing: First, we do not have sufficient international consensus about the vital role of a free, independent, and professional global press. And, second, here in the US we do not really have the capacity for high-quality, professional journalism on a global scale.

On the first point: many nations, of course, actively fear an independent press and see journalism more as an instrument of governmental policy than as a source of objective information and analysis. In these countries there is debilitating censorship and restrictions on the media's access to information. But the problems this creates for the free flow of information and ideas are no longer limited to speech in



those nations. What happens in a system of global communication is the same thing that happens with local censorship in a national system—censorship anywhere chills speakers everywhere. A lot of what we will need to know about the world in the coming years will come through the efforts of “local” journalists. When “local” journalism is suppressed, therefore, our ability to hear and know is curtailed. In other words, censorship in, say, China, can be as significant, or even more significant to us than censorship in, say, California.

As we work to surmount this challenge, we need to remind ourselves that our own American route to a vibrant free press was not a straight line; our approach was neither consistent nor wholly admirable. We too sent people to jail merely for giving speeches or publishing commentary that the government claimed would undermine public order. We too tried to enjoin the press from publishing official secrets. We too denied the press access to newsworthy events and information.

What we ended up discarding is currently accepted in some parts of the world. China, in particular, appears to be struggling with a commitment to a more or less open economic system and a relatively closed communications system. Two contrasting interpretations of contemporary China have been emerging. One view surmises that the sophisticated leadership of China understands and accepts that the changes in Chinese citizens produced by the adoption of capitalism will inevitably result in greater demands for intellectual openness. It’s just a matter of time, according to this view. But another view from serious China observers is that the leadership believes quite the opposite—that they can have both sustained economic growth and a closely controlled society. They see these societal characteristics not as inconsistent or in tension but as complementary. Many are watching to see how this great debate between two competing visions of contemporary China will be resolved and which will ultimately prevail.

Persuading the Chinese that it is a mistake to choose a closed society may not be easy. Up to this point in our history, the dialogue about such matters has generally been about human rights. Clearly, the concept of human rights has been one of the great advances in human civilization. But one of the key aspects of globalization is that, because all of us are directly and adversely affected by the suppression of information in any one nation, we have additional reasons for objecting to censorship, beyond our noble concern for human rights.

Are we ready and able to make the case to the Chinese that they will be better off if they choose a path of openness and an independent press? Arguments about truth, democratic self-governance, and tolerance will be difficult to develop persuasively for China. But China believes in the national benefits of a free-market economic system. A more effective argument, then, may be that openness over time may be linked to sustained economic growth. The argument might go like this: Right now you are able to grow economically, at a rate never before witnessed in human history, because you have a natural base in manufacturing and exporting goods, which does not require a high level of societal creativity and innovation. At some point, however, you are going to lose that advantage,

and your success will then depend upon a culture and social character that thrives on independent thinking and creativity. There is, moreover, a direct link between the commitment to a vigorous free press (as well as free speech) and that kind of character. You would be wise to begin to cultivate that shift.

I have to admit that we have precious little study, analysis, and data to support such an argument, even though I believe it. It is a different tack from the one we have successfully employed in this country to develop our own commitment to a free press. We would be wise to expand our understanding of freedom of the press and its relation to *all* the things we value—including a vibrant economy—to make a stronger case for openness in the global debate.

BEYOND CONTROL AND CENSORSHIP IS ANOTHER QUESTION: What do we need to do to make sure we’re getting the information and ideas—the quality as well as the amount—we need for dealing with this new global society? How do we build up our capacity to produce the journalism we need?

Before we get to that, some quick observations:

The first is somewhat obvious: there has been a significant and distressing contraction in the coverage of the world by the American press since the onset of the financial crisis that has overwhelmed the profession. Along with the inevitable shrinkage of newsrooms has come the elimination of foreign bureaus and foreign correspondents. Reporting of foreign news is, naturally, down as well. At the moment when we need a great expansion of such journalism, there’s a great contraction.

Second, a parallel development is the rise of national media in other nations designed to have a global presence. BBC World News and BBC World Service have been and are leaders here, but new entrants are coming into the arena—notable examples being Al Jazeera of Qatar, Xinhua News Agency and CCTV of China, and France 24.

Third, it is a reasonably debatable question whether the proliferation of expression that has arrived via the Internet will naturally provide the kind and quality of information we need in a globalized world. People often point to the rise of “citizen journalists” as an offset to the declining fortunes of the traditional press. I believe this is not an even exchange, that journalistic institutions matter, and, therefore we will need to do more than adopt a *laissez-faire* attitude about the fate of the press.

Fourth, while philanthropy and nonprofit models add a great deal to the journalistic mix, the sustainable institutions they create are unlikely to reach the scale that the world needs.

But neither will the free market. The press, as we have come to define its role in public life, is a public good, and public goods are never completely realized in a free-market environment. I have argued in the past that as the world becomes more interconnected and interdependent, we need a greater commitment of public funding for the press so that US newsgathering operations may successfully establish a broader global reach and footprint.

To those who believe that public funding is inconsistent with our free-press traditions, here are a few facts. First, our

## America needs a stronger publicly funded system of international news.

modern press is the result of a complex structure that has more components than just private ownership operating in an open and free market. Newspapers have, indeed, largely been under private ownership, though by the middle of the twentieth century, it was clear that features of the daily newspaper business were leading to monopoly status in virtually every city across the country. Most American cities have one daily, a situation that is part blessing and part curse. Even this largely unregulated market in daily newspapers produced a better product (in the sense of elevating their capacity to inform their readers and the public) for reasons beyond "business," by not pocketing all of their monopolistic profits, but instead by investing in hiring specialized reporters to deepen their coverage. This began in the 1970s and continued until recently, when under major new technological and marketplace pressures and through the loss of its previous monopolistic protections, the press began shedding journalistic capacity.

Broadcasting, meanwhile, was designed (under the Radio Act of 1927 and then the Communications Act of 1934) to be comprised of private owners licensed by the government and regulated according to the "public interest, convenience, or necessity." That system included regulations intended to expand the range of voices the "public" needed to hear, yet would not if the "licensees" solely followed their "business" interests. Hence the government devised policies to promote coverage of "local" news, "fairness" in the discussion of public issues, and "equal time" in the coverage of candidates for public office—all upheld by the Supreme Court as constitutional under the First Amendment.

Finally, there is another branch of the US media, the system of public broadcasting, surviving in part through direct public funding.

So while the market is a powerful system for a strong free press and must be the dominant model, there is no reason in experience to conclude that a free market alone will yield the press we need. My point is not that in order to sustain a high-quality institution of the press, you must rely on monopolies and public funding and regulation. It is rather that we need to be realistic about how we got to the point at which we created a high-quality press, and realize that it will not happen again with a free market operating alone. We should realistically consider what might be done to enhance the opportunities for the press to produce high-quality journalism in a global public forum.

TO THAT END, I HAVE A CONCRETE SUGGESTION. AS NOTED above, other nations are using their state-sponsored and

funded media to establish a broad global presence, and through that to advance their national agendas. We in the United States cannot take it for granted that global competitors like Al Jazeera, or China's CCTV or Xinhua News, will just naturally evolve into the quality of journalism both the US and the world needs. To be sure, CNN provides one home-grown model of a successful American news broadcaster with global editorial reach. Along with a small handful of our national newspapers and wire services, it continues to have bureaus and correspondents abroad while our three major broadcast networks largely have withdrawn from the field. When there is major breaking news either in the US or abroad, CNN and CNN International have frequently excelled at providing live coverage. But we know that commercial pressures, as well as loss of domestic audience share to more explicitly ideological competitors on the right and left, have caused CNN's international news coverage to become more reactive and less committed to sustained, in-depth reporting. While natural disasters or violent conflicts typically bring out the best in CNN's reporting, American viewers and listeners must turn to our own public broadcasters, NPR and PBS, for day-to-day insight into important but more routine political and business news stories from around the world. The ironic fact is that, in addition to NPR's own high-quality international coverage, these US public broadcasters are providing American audiences with the news reporting of the BBC and the BBC World Service, which comes to us largely courtesy of British taxpayers.

As it happens, we already have NPR and PBS partially government-funded, along with their affiliate stations across the nation, at around \$400 million annually. Like the BBC, these are highly regarded journalistic enterprises. But while NPR engages in worldwide reporting, that reporting is not anything close to the scale of either what is needed and possible, or to what peer systems have to work with in other countries. NPR programming reaches 26.8 million listeners "across the nation and territories" per week. The BBC's World Service alone reaches about 180 million listeners weekly. In any case, we have been well served during much of our history by having a mixed system of both commercial and publicly supported media in the US. They often have different strengths and weaknesses, provide healthy competition for one another and, taken together, result in a robust diversity of news sources. Thus, America would be well advised to plan for a stronger publicly funded system of international news broadcasting of its own.

Meanwhile, for reaching global audiences, the US has a series of government-sponsored broadcasting entities set up primarily during the Cold War to combat Communist propaganda by communicating the position of the United States. Voice of America and Radio Free Europe are the legendary institutions of this group, which also includes Radio Free Asia, Radio and TV Marti (for Cuba), and Alhurra (for the Middle East); collectively, these entities receive nearly \$750 million in government funding annually. Interestingly, because these were established as communications media of the United States government, and therefore were seen as having the potential to spread our own propaganda and

potentially infect the American marketplace of ideas, the Congress forbade these media from re-broadcasting back into the US, under the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948. Even in the era of the Internet, where these media agencies have active and readily available websites, this prohibition remains in place (and seems to me at this point constitutionally suspect).

The more interesting problem, though, is why the US would continue to maintain and fund this dual system of respected journalism in NPR and PBS, on the one hand, and the international propaganda media, on the other, when what we—and the world—need more than anything is truly global journalism capable of reporting the news in an independent, objective, and professional manner.

That is why I propose something new, an American World Service: a media institution with sufficient funding to bring the highest-quality American journalism to the global public forum.

It is, of course, absolutely necessary that editorial autonomy for such an entity be secured. It is worth re-emphasizing that both NPR and PBS have achieved a status of highly respected journalism (as has the BBC) while using state funding. Experience demonstrates that it is possible to maintain such autonomy and independence with state funding. It is also worth noting that every system of funding for the press, including the free market, carries risks of funders—whether the state, or foundations, or advertisers—trying to exert undue and inappropriate influence. We, therefore, cannot escape the problem of improper interference by abandoning the idea of public funding.

In the end, what we want is a better, modern-day version of what we've had: a vibrant mixed system—mostly free market, with some publicly supported institutions—to achieve our overarching goal of acquiring the information we must have in order to forge both an understanding of, and a consensus about, what kind of world we want to create.

While it is true that government spending on television and radio has been opposed in some quarters of Congress for as long as we have had public broadcasting in this country—and that the political climate of the moment is notably hostile to this effort—it also is clear that the importance of foreign newsgathering to civic discourse in the US will continue to grow. If those of us committed to open and robust public debate refrain from making the case for an American World Service until all the political stars are in alignment, this inaction will further delay the creation of a true global public forum.

Globalization is the great change of our era, wrought of economic forces forging connections throughout the world and of new technologies making human communication far easier. We need institutions designed to help us understand, tame, and channel these largely positive forces, and a free and independent global press is one such institution.

More than anything, we need a change in consciousness—to envision the problem we must solve as not only a matter of securing human rights for peoples but also securing the information and ideas we need to govern effectively in an increasingly integrated world. This is the ultimate stage of a progressive shift from the local to the national to the global. An American World Service will help us get there. **CJR**



## Big Bird to the Rescue?

*Public television remains largely indifferent to calls to boost serious news coverage*

BY ELIZABETH JENSEN

Representative Earl Blumenauer stood before a microphone outside the Capitol building in February to make a passionate plea for continued federal funding of public broadcasting. The Oregon Democrat argued that news, specifically community news, is “not commercially viable. The public needs to be there.”

But in making his case, the bow-tied Congressman stood shoulder-to-shoulder with a life-sized, fuzzy-suited Arthur, the aardvark star of the popular PBS kids’ show. Stuffed plushies of Big Bird and Grover, the *Sesame Street* Muppets, perched on his podium.

And therein lies a conundrum: The public interest community wants public media to rescue serious journalism. But in public television, at least, Big Bird is the big draw.

Focused on self-preservation as they are, burdened with high overhead and declining income, the nation’s 356 public television stations have done precious little to fill a news gap in an era when newspapers are struggling for survival and commercial broadcasters increasingly embrace polarized opinion programming. Public television players are instead clamoring for safe programming that doesn’t alienate core viewers. The biggest programming news coming out of the PBS annual meeting in May was a new *Antiques Roadshow* spin-off.

Public media today is held up as the potential savior of serious journalism, the place with the potential to tackle

ELIZABETH JENSEN, a freelance journalist, writes about public broadcasting for The New York Times.

the tough topics—complicated revolutions in Arab lands and zoning board shenanigans alike—that an informed citizenry needs to function. Bill Kling, the just-retired president and chief executive of American Public Media, predicts public broadcasting will be “the last journalism standing.”

Public radio has certainly taken up the cause. NPR has created an investigative unit, showcased foreign coverage, and launched multiple projects to bolster local station news reporting, which many stations have embraced. But public television?

With a few notable exceptions, it seems oddly absent from the fevered conversation about innovation and radical rethinking of the possibilities of journalism. The system certainly has the capacity to try some new and different approaches to delivering news, with nearly two stations for every population market except the smallest ones.

But only a few stations are experimenting with news. Others have yet to attract solid funding for their efforts and many of the rest aren't interested in pursuing more news. The system overall has done little to address a Byzantine structure that can discourage local newsgathering. Nor has it helped forge a way for stations to work together on a coordinated strategy.

On the national front, PBS has two solid news offerings—*PBS NewsHour* and *Frontline*—but not much else. David Fanning, *Frontline*'s executive producer and founder, says that by not making journalism an urgent priority, public television is missing an opportunity. “I think this is about defining ourselves in the landscape,” he says. “Even if journalism on air is not always going to get you the highest audiences, it's going to get you attention and it's going to make you more relevant.”

Despite their high hopes for so much more, viewers who are counting on public television to fill the gap for serious news on a large scale are bound to be disappointed. Unless significant reforms are made, public television won't be making everything A-okay for the news business.

### News Is a Tough Sell

News, be it local, national, or international, has been a tough sell ever since PBS was founded in 1970. A preference for safe, non-controversial programming like *Sesame Street* is part of its DNA, says Lawrence Grossman, PBS president from 1976 to 1984.

One of Grossman's first bold moves at PBS was to offer a new half-hour national news program, *The MacNeil/Lehrer Report*, to stations for free for six months. Station managers were outraged, insisting that, he remembers them saying, “Washington” shouldn't dictate programming, and that “localism will determine our own curriculum.”

The managers' protestations were not to protect locally produced news shows, Grossman explains. “No one does local news programming,” he says, calling it the “great contradiction” of public television. Rather, the stations were fighting to reserve the right to pick whatever programs they chose, and to air them when they pleased. If they were locked into a specific half-hour of *MacNeil/Lehrer*, they feared a small piece of their prized independence would be lost.

Despite the initial controversy, *MacNeil/Lehrer*'s brand of

intellectually rigorous newsgathering was a hit with viewers. In 1983, PBS wanted to expand the newscast to an hour. It was another fight, says Linda Winslow, the *NewsHour*'s current executive producer.

“A number of stations traditionally felt they were just not convinced that news and public affairs was a big part of the mission of public broadcasting,” she says. Stations saw their

**‘Far too many other unconventional programs never had a chance.’**

role as providing an alternative to the commercial networks and questioned why they should cover the same events as ABC, NBC, and CBS.

Something else was at work in stations' reticence to engage in news. Grossman believes the reluctance reflected their origins as extensions of controversy-averse universities and boards of education. “The idea was to avoid issues that would fragment, or raise hackles,” says Grossman. “It had a lot to do, I think, with the educational culture that says our job is not to antagonize anybody or to raise tough issues as part of education. Our job is to make everybody happy.”

The system's risk-averse tendencies were reinforced by the reaction to a 1970 documentary, *Banks and The Poor*, distributed by PBS. The hard-hitting piece of journalism suggested members of Congress were complicit with exploitative banks. Soon after it aired, an antagonized Nixon administration started reorganizing the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which began channeling federal monies for production away from PBS and toward the local stations themselves.

Bill Moyers, speaking at the 2006 PBS annual meeting, made reference to that brouhaha as a way to explain public television's queasy attitude toward pursuing tough journalism, lest it jeopardize federal funding, which makes up about 15 percent of the system's budget.

“Far too many other unconventional programs never had a chance,” Moyers told the meeting. “Even when the strings are not tightly pulled, you knew they are there, and the worst thing that came out of that ugly episode was that we have never been able to completely shake out of our collective mind the fear that the chicken snake might prove to be a boa constrictor.”

Today, at times a deeply seated conflicted attitude toward news seems to ooze from every pixel. During President Obama's State of the Union speech in January, Washington's WETA-TV—the same station that produces the estimable *PBS NewsHour* and *Washington Week* for PBS distribution—embarrassingly forgot to turn off automated station promos at the top of hour, interrupting the President. That said, WETA was one of a minority of public television stations carrying the speech live.



Most public television stations have chosen not to rock the boat and to stick with a decades-old formula of a little bit of something for everyone: daytime educational kids shows; the *PBS NewsHour* and *Nightly Business Report* in the evening; dramas, science, performances, and documentaries in primetime; and the Charlie Rose and Tavis Smiley talk shows to cap the day.

There are, of course, pockets of distinguished news coverage on PBS. Jim Lehrer in recent years has made sure that PBS alone among broadcasters has committed to full coverage of political conventions, and a much-needed overhaul of the *NewsHour* website has resulted in a 43 percent increase in pageviews in fifteen months. *Frontline*, produced by Boston's WGBH-TV for PBS distribution, is attempting to become more nimble by presenting occasional magazine-style shows featuring multiple stories as a break from its signature long-form documentaries. Both have partnered with each other and with other news organizations, such as the nonprofit ProPublica, to co-produce timely investigative pieces.

But PBS is shrinking its Friday night public affairs schedule this fall by a half-hour—to sixty minutes, or half what it was until April 2010 when *Bill Moyers Journal* and *Now on PBS* went off air—partly in response to stations that would prefer lighter entertainment fare. Michael Getler, the PBS ombudsman, says PBS is at a “serious disadvantage” by having no news on the weekends.

At the local level, the Federal Communication Commission's just-released “The Information Needs of Communities” study reported that 68 percent of noncommercial TV stations provided no local news in the course of three weeks. “Local commercial TV news has often been criticized for its insufficient coverage of serious issues—but the unfortunate reality is that local public TV has produced even less,” the report found.

Public television's stance on news is a stark contrast to that of public radio stations, which over the past decade have doubled down on news and remade themselves into news and public affairs powerhouses. In May, San Diego's KPBS became the latest of thirty-three public radio stations to jettison its hybrid classical music/news format, and go all news, all the time. The switches have created a powerful cycle: the listening audience has soared, leading to increased listener donations, allowing money to be plowed back into news coverage, particularly focused on local and regional issues.

### A Compartmentalized Approach

Like at NPR, a majority of PBS's board members come from local stations, which vary widely in size. The structure reinforces a compartmentalized approach that makes it difficult to achieve consensus on addressing programming challenges. Other elements of public television's structure also serve to weaken stations' ability to venture into news.

Unlike public radio, which made a key decision early on to allow member stations to interweave local news into the national reports, *PBS NewsHour* never allowed “cut-ins.” That's a disappointment to Daniel Schmidt, the president and chief executive of Chicago's WTTW-TV, which has programmed the local newscast *Chicago Tonight* on weeknights since 1984. He

says, “One of the reasons local stations haven't developed that ability is that they haven't had that opportunity.”

Tom Karlo, general manager of KPBS in San Diego, which has both radio and television outlets, supports cut-ins as well. “What helped NPR really ascend was the fact that local stations were putting local content into *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*,” he says. His TV station runs local news headlines sandwiched between PBS primetime programs.

*NewsHour*'s Winslow isn't convinced. “There aren't enough stations that can justify doing it,” she says. “There are a small number of stations asking for it and a large number of stations asking for something else. I never heard a groundswell and, as time went by, fewer and fewer stations were producing local programming.”

Another force that undermines production of local news, some station managers say, is the PBS dues structure. Stations that successfully raise non-federal funds pay higher membership dues to PBS. In reality, most funds raised locally are restricted grants that can only be used for a particular local show and not for PBS dues, which support the national program schedule. Stations that produce national shows get a discount on their dues.

“We get punished for making local content by making our local dues go up,” fumes WTTW's Schmidt, adding that PBS financial policies “force these Hobson's choices.”

Paula Kerger, president and chief executive of PBS, counters that rewarding national production is appropriate because those stations are giving back to all the other stations. She adds that the federal grant system offsets some of the pain by rewarding local fundraising with increased CPB grants.

Those who want to do more news share the same problem: money.

Al Jerome, president and chief executive of Los Angeles station KCET, the second-largest PBS member, got fed up with the dues structure. After successfully raising \$50 million—\$25 million from BP alone—to fund a bilingual daily program for childcare workers, KCET's PBS dues bill soared. After a bitter, eleven-month back-and-forth over what Jerome believes were demands for excessively high fees to stay in the system, KCET abruptly announced in October 2010 that it would quit PBS on January 1.

Jerome quickly replaced the PBS news programs with a 4–7 p.m. block of international news from the BBC, Al Jazeera English, Japan's NHK, and Israel's IBA. The shows have been a rare ratings bright spot for the station. He is now attempting to craft an independent schedule that will rely heavily on local production—but first he must raise the funds.

He hopes to expand KCET's *SoCal Connected*, a weekly news show, to daily production. A daily 10 p.m. in-depth

interview show focused on Southern California newsmakers is also in development. "It will be reflective of public media, not oriented toward guests plugging their next movie or book," Jerome says. A third show, *Global Watch*, would be a weekly international affairs newsmagazine focused on regions of particular interest to Southern Californians.

### The Biggest Obstacle

Those like Jerome who want to do more news share the same problem: money.

Although public broadcasting successfully beat back efforts to cut its federal funding this year, states have been rapidly trimming or eliminating public broadcasting subsidies. Florida Governor Rick Scott, a Republican, was the latest to zero out funds in May. According to the CPB, between 2008 and 2009, non-federal support of public television stations fell by \$260 million nationwide. For 2010, public radio and TV stations surveyed by CPB projected a 14 percent drop in revenue, due to state cutbacks and declines in corporate and philanthropic support and viewer pledges.

Philadelphia's WHYY, licensed as a Delaware station, knows the problem well. In 2009, it ended the state's only nightly newscast, *Delaware Tonight*, as a budget-saving move, subbing in a weekly program. Even New York's WNET, a major station that wants to move more deeply into news and thinks it has found an inexpensive formula for doing so, has been stymied.

WNET's *Worldfocus* international newscast lasted eighteen months before money ran out in April 2010. Its Friday newsmagazine for PBS, *Need to Know*, has been on the air for just over a year, but with funding likewise dwindling, PBS announced that in the fall it will cut it in half to thirty minutes. The station's soon-to-launch *MetroFocus* was originally conceived of as a broadcast program, as well as an online and mobile venture. It will debut only as the cheaper digital effort, with tentative plans to start the broadcast component by the end of the year.

"If resources were available more stations would do more journalism," says PBS chief Kerger. "It's cheaper for them to acquire programs from us than to produce local journalism."

The irony is that localism is the go-to argument that Kerger and others pull out when touting public television's value in the media landscape. "We are the ultimate local organization," Kerger told an April symposium on the future of public broadcasting.

Chicago's Schmidt says of public television's claims to localism: "As a system, we have good rhetoric about that. We like to say we have deep relationships in the community, and that's what differentiates us from the cable channels. We talk a good game about all of our outreach and points of contact with our constituencies and Americans."

But the reality, Schmidt says, is, "We are missing an opportunity to address this idea of being locally relevant."

For some stations, there's also a reluctance to duplicate what they see as vibrant local news offerings from their commercial rivals.

John Boland, president and chief executive of San Fran-

cisco's KQED, wants his TV station to do more local news. But, he says, the format is an open question. "The knee-jerk reaction is we should have an evening news program on television, but I'm not convinced of it," he says. Tom Rosenstiel, director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, notes that public radio stations that have bulked up on news are filling a void left by commercial radio. Just thirty commercial radio stations nationwide currently program full-time news, by his count.

There's been no such collapse of local television content. More stations are running local news than ever, and more of it. Stations in more than forty markets last year added a 4:30 a.m. newscast. "If you're a PBS television station and part of what you think you're doing is counter-programming, news is not as logical a thing to offer as news on radio," Rosenstiel says.

Those arguments run counter to the high hopes that the public interest community holds for public media.

Leonard Downie Jr. and Michael Schudson, in their 2009 "Reconstruction of American Journalism" report for the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, recommended that "Public radio and television should be substantially reoriented to provide significant local news reporting in every community served by public stations and their websites."

PBS has been comparatively slow to offer help to stations.

Likewise, New America Foundation President Steve Coll, writing in *CJR's* November/December 2010 issue, proposed channeling spectrum user fees collected from commercial broadcasters to a revamped CPB, to be used to beef up reporting operations, particularly the local capacity, of public television and radio.

And in a December 2010 Knight Commission white paper, "Rethinking Public Media: More Local, More Inclusive, More Interactive," Barbara Cochran, a former vice president of news at NPR, called on public broadcasters to move faster into localism and take bigger steps to reform infrastructure if they want to maintain their claim on government investment.

Radio, which is admittedly far cheaper than television, has been able to cobble together innovative projects attempting to address the need for more local content. NPR's new Impact of Government project, funded by a large initial grant from the Open Society Foundations, is attempting to place a total of one hundred journalists at NPR stations in all fifty states, to report on how state government actions play out over time. (NPR's then-Ombudsman Alicia Shepard raised ethical questions in May about that grant, given the foundation's well-known left-leaning funder, financier George Soros; his Open Society Institute has supported *CJR*.) The Argo Project, another NPR venture backed by the Knight Foundation, is training select

local stations in how to expand local news programming in niche areas. CPB last year pledged \$7.5 million for seven regional public radio and TV reporting collaborations.

PBS has been comparatively slow to offer help to stations. Instead, in 2009, on the advice of an outside consultant, it began developing PBSnews.org, a "news navigator" aggregation site which some saw as competition to the newly beefed up *NewsHour* website. But in March, PBS pulled the plug on the aggregation site. "I don't have the money right now to take it to the next step and I'm not going to half-launch something," Kerger says.

PBS is now moving some of the money and technology earmarked for the website into technical resources and staff training to help its stations move more deeply into local journalism.

### Some Successes

Against this backdrop, a few public television stations are trying to break the mold. In St. Louis, KETC-TV offered housing to the St. Louis Beacon, an online investigative newsroom formed in 2008 after steep layoffs at the local *Post-Dispatch* newspaper; the two have since collaborated notably on reports on the home mortgage crisis.

In Chicago, WTTW and the *NewsHour* just received an innovative, one-year, \$250,000 grant from the Joyce Foundation that seeks to bolster the local/national model. Equal sums of \$75,000 will fund national arts coverage on the *NewsHour*, and local reporting on WTTW's *Chicago Tonight*, whose own ratings have soared in the past year. The remainder will pay for stories produced by the twelve-person *Chicago Tonight* news staff, which will air on the *NewsHour*, on issues of national importance from the Midwest.

San Francisco's KQED merged its television and radio news services into a single operation last summer and added an online site, KQEDnews.org. With an increase of \$1 million to its \$14 million annual news and public affairs budget—more than 25 percent of its annual spending—KQED increased its local news staff by more than 10 percent and tripled local radio newscasts.

The key to finding the money, KQED chief Boland says, is that "you've got to have a radio station; that really gives you critical mass. You've got to work across platforms and merge your resources. And then you need to partner outside the building."

In April, KQED partnered with California Watch, the Center for Investigative Reporting's online nonprofit news site, to produce an investigative report on seismic safety in California public schools. The project ran on KQED's website, for five days on radio, and, in a first for the station, as a half-hour television special. "That's a breakthrough for us, breaking out of the pattern of our regular weekly roundtable TV show, to put what's essentially a baby *Frontline* on the air here in the Bay Area," Boland says.

The most tantalizing success comes from San Diego, where station manager Karlo says, "We are growing because of our news."

In 2009, KPBS merged its public radio, television, and web newsgathering into a single content production center, based

on the success of its radio news operations. In the May 2011 Arbitron ratings, KPBS-FM shared the lead among all San Diego radio stations in time spent listening.

"I felt that there was a void" in commercial media, says Karlo. "I thought, if we could be number one in radio news why can't we be number one in local TV news and online news?" Audiences have grown with each incremental news addition, prompting the switch to all-news radio in May, and coming in September, the launch of a nightly TV newscast. The new ventures have been paid for by full-court fundraising, soliciting major donors to underwrite three-year commitments, at \$80,000 a year, to fund individual reporting beats. The reporters work for all three outlets: radio, TV, and online.

Another prototype of the future newsroom may be coming together in Cleveland, where the television station WVIZ and radio station WCPN have combined into a public media center known as Ideastream. Also under the umbrella, among others, are the Ohio Statehouse News Bureau and the Ohio Channel, a digital broadcast and online streaming service with C-SPAN-like coverage of state government and public affairs shows from the state's other public stations.

Cochran, now a professor at the Missouri School of Journalism, says Ideastream is evidence that in the long run, it won't matter if public television isn't a player. "At some point this is all going to merge," in a single digital news stream or community information center, she says, and "the difference between television and radio stations is not going to be significant."

In late April, the *NewsHour* itself quietly began streaming its newscast online live, for free, on ustream.tv (it is also available after broadcast, on the PBS website). While the potential is there to cannibalize local stations' viewing numbers, Hari Sreenivasan, a correspondent and director of digital partnerships for the *NewsHour*, says he hopes stations will embed the feed on their websites, drawing viewers and potential donors, who might not watch on-air.

Sreenivasan, a former correspondent for CBS and ABC who joined the *NewsHour* in December 2009, has become somewhat of a one-man evangelist exhorting local stations to do more local news. "A handful of local stations have very good newsgathering infrastructures, and some are simply repeating national content," he says. He has begun offering local stations unused *NewsHour* footage on occasion.

He seeks out local content that can augment the *NewsHour*, which has a bare-bones correspondent corps and a minimal travel budget. Sreenivasan says part of what is driving his efforts is an attempt to replicate the correspondent pool reach of the commercial networks by tapping into talent at local public television stations. When news breaks out and there is no *NewsHour* reporter to go cover it, "it's very bizarre for me," Sreenivasan says.

He's already gotten past the skepticism of some stations that thought the *NewsHour* was simply trolling for free content; the *NewsHour*, unlike NPR, has never paid local stations even a nominal fee for content they contribute. That's yet another tradition that might have to fall if public television hopes to become a serious player in the news business. **CJR**

# The Great Right Hype

*Tucker Carlson and his Daily Caller*

BY JOEL MEARES

When Tucker Carlson took the stage at the Conservative Political Action Conference in February 2009, he opened by inviting the assembled to speak up should they disagree with what he was about to say. "Most speakers hate to be interrupted," he began, setting up a symbol-crasher for CPACers still smarting from the Clinton administration, "but I enjoy it, having spent about ten years in cable news getting interrupted and yelled at by a large bald

man from Louisiana called James Carville." The room guffawed. "It actually makes me uncomfortable if people don't scream at me as I speak."

About fourteen minutes later, Carlson must have been feeling very comfy indeed. He was arriving at the main point of his speech: that conservative journalists needed to reassess their priorities and seek new facts as aggressively as they produced blistering opinions. "Honestly, if you create a news organization whose primary objective is not to deliver accurate news, you will fail," said Carlson in what sounded like the passing whoosh of a pointy dart, blogosphere-bound. "*The New York Times* is a liberal paper, but it is also ... a paper that actually cares about accuracy. Conservatives need to build institutions that mirror those institutions."

The mere mention of the *Times* raised dissenting boos. "*The New York Times* is twisted," cried one woman above the din. But Carlson listened cordially, his pocket square unruf-

fled, and eventually won the crowd back—"Why aren't there twenty-five Fox Newses?" he asked. "There ought to be." And then he got out what he had been trying to say: he was the one to answer the challenge he was setting.

A year after low ratings and a steepening leftways tilt threw him from the good ship MSNBC, Carlson was launching a website. It would combine the *Times*'s devotion to accuracy and shoe-leather truth-seeking with the right's view of what that truth is. Other conservatives would hopefully follow. "They need to go out there and find what is happening," Carlson said, "not just interpret things they hear in the mainstream media but gather the news themselves. That's expensive, it's difficult, and it is worth doing."

He left the stage to applause.

MORE THAN TWO YEARS LATER, THE website Carlson heralded is in full swing. The emphasis is still on that difficult and worthy one—gathering the news. And it is packaged in a way to give those CPAC hands a reason to keep clapping. With its conservative tone and story list, *The Daily Caller* reads more like a twenty-sixth Fox News than New York's storied gray lady.

The Caller has carved out a cozy corner of the web in its short life. It's a place for conservatives to read about the latest liberal scandal and the latest movements in the GOP presidential field. As a day-to-day chronicle of political Washington and as an ideological pot-stirrer, it matches peers like the online

arms of the *Washington Examiner* and *National Review*, and web native reporters like Talking Points Memo. By simple virtue of trying, it bests pure aggregators like Matt Drudge. Its reporting surpasses what Andrew Breitbart has on offer.

But when *The Daily Caller* has reached for the big scoop, the results have been less impressive. Headline-grabbing exclusives—mostly intercepted e-mails and tweets and attacks on media rivals—have exploded across the web before fizzling under scrutiny. Sexed-up headlines burned above stories too twisted or bland to support them. Quotes were ripped out of context, corrections buried, and important disclosures dismissed. It's a picture that sits uncomfortably alongside the vision laid out by Carlson at CPAC, one that has drummed up clicks but little respect.

Ask Carlson himself if he's living up to the mission of a truth-seeking reporting house, and he gives a firm "yes." Plenty in Washington would disagree.



Launched on January 11, 2010, The Daily Caller is a mash-up of Carlson's nobler aspirations and the tabloid-style hit-bait common to websites from Politico to Gawker. There are clickable reams of original reporting, particularly from Capitol Hill. Since March 2010, the site has had a rotating spot in the White House press pool. But then there are the slideshows: "Creepiest Easter Bunnies" and galleries devoted to seemingly every young actress with a credit to her name. It all unspools in a spray of bold red headlines ("Barack Obama, 'Killing Machine'?") and striking headshots. While its founder may bridle at a comparison *The Guardian* once made—"the conservative answer to The Huffington Post"—it's a superficially helpful one.

The Caller has had much to prove. Slapping down his gauntlet at CPAC, Carlson grazed the faces of conservatives under the impression they already were doing reporting. Blogger Michelle Malkin dismissed Carlson's address as "uninformed sanctimony." That Carlson had made his name as that guy in the bow tie sharing his *opinions* on CNN was particularly grating.

Early on, in March 2010, the Caller delivered a scoop that had promise and impact: sources said Michael Steele, then chair of the Republican National Committee, considered using party funds to buy a private plane. More sensationally, filings showed Steele authorized a \$1,946.25 payment for an evening at a bondage-themed nightclub.

Yet the Caller's first story on the filings incorrectly implied Steele himself had been behind the velvet rope, in the presence of topless performers simulating lesbian sex. That off note hinted at what was to come: a series of splashy stories that, when examined, produced more skepticism than pick-up, and caused new hecklers to raise their voices. A Caller report accusing *National Review* of prearranging a glowing editorial for the GOP ignited more headlines about the ensuing intramural scuffle than the supposed scoop itself. A planned exposé suggesting plagiarism in Jane Mayer's detail-rich *New Yorker* investigation on the Koch brothers was killed for lack of evidence—a *New York Post* media column crowed "Smear Disappears." Carlson drew clicks with an extended series on "Journolist"—the e-mail listserv of mostly liberal journalists and academics that the Caller claimed were scheming to protect candidate Obama—but the controversial reports left many prominent Washington press types, Left and Right, cold.

As face and founder, Carlson bore the brunt of his website's criticisms. Was he out to create a legitimate news site, as he had said? Or was he just another right-wing attack dog? Was this really serious reporting? The verdict was especially harsh from some in the Washington press corps. A number I spoke to said the project appeared to be dissolving under the pressure to perform. "Nobody ever says, 'Oh my God, did you see that thing in the Caller?'" one well-placed Washington journalist told me. "Nobody feels like they need to read it."

That talk might unnervingly some budding Washington web impresarios, but not the man comforted by dissent. Sitting before me, his pocket square still wrinkle-free and his TV-thickened skin unscarred, he seems quite comfy indeed. "I care very deeply about what a small group of people think



and I try not to pay a huge amount of attention to the rest," he says. "It works for me."

WE MEET IN EARLY APRIL AT THE PALM—"IN WASHINGTON, everybody eats at the Palm," Carlson once wrote in *The New York Times*. The forty-two-year-old is a bright spot in the restaurant's beige and gray crowd. Plumper now than when he was TV's conservative fresh face, he's wearing what's become his uniform since he ditched the once ubiquitous

## Often lost in a parade of cheesy grins is Carlson's track record of good—great, even—reporting.

bow tie almost a decade ago: blue shirt, navy blazer, loose khakis, brown loafers, pocket square, and today, a salmon-colored bird-dog tie. He's ravenous, he says, and his hunger gives this interviewer hope. In his 2003 book, *Politicians, Partisans, and Parasites*, Carlson wrote, "If there's an iron law of journalism, it's that cautious people don't do interviews with their mouths full. Reckless people do."

It was at the Palm, just before the 2008 election, that the idea for *The Daily Caller* was born. Carlson had been "canned," as he puts it, by MSNBC and was dining with his good friend Neil Patel. Patel, Carlson's roommate from Trinity College, would also be looking for work soon: he was Vice President Cheney's primary advisor on domestic and economic policy. At dinner, Patel told Carlson he'd been thinking about starting a website. "Nobody had figured out the news business model yet," Patel says. "The Huffington Post had clearly discovered it for the liberal audience," and that left a gap on the Right.

They drew up a business plan and nabbed a \$3 million investment from big-time Wyoming GOP donor Foster Friess. Carlson quickly put the money where his mouth had been at CPAC. They leased offices near Dupont Circle, hired an ad team, and began collecting reporters. They wooed *Guardian* Washington editor Megan Mulligan and installed her as executive editor. Next came a stream of pressmen from around the capital and big-name columnists like Carlson's friend, Matt Labash, the witty star writer of *The Weekly Standard*. He continued adding after launch: Mickey Kaus, Matt Lewis, and even conservative activist (and Supreme Court spouse) Ginni Thomas. As of June, the *Caller* had thirty-two editorial staffers, including Carlson, the editor, and seven on the business side, including Patel, the publisher.

Carlson has high expectations for the team, telling me he hopes every story on his site will someday be adjective-free—"they're a lazy man's verb." But top of the list is to plug the rightward reporting hole that navel-gazing conservatives have long noted and watched grow as news has shifted from

page to screen. Where the leading digital outlets to emerge on the Left in the last decade—Talking Points Memo, Think Progress, et al.—have emphasized investigation and complex information-moving infrastructures, the Right has focused on aggregation and opinion.

Jon Henke, a conservative political consultant and blogger, suggests that liberals built this muscle to counteract the supposed vast right-wing conspiracy. "Their estimation of the Right's infrastructure was, at least in part, paranoia," he notes, "but paranoia is a great strategist." Dave Weigel, who covers the conservative beat for Slate, hits that same point: the Left built up to fight a phantom; now, with outlets like the *Caller*, "the phantom is starting to build itself."

IT WILL SURPRISE SOME THAT TUCKER CARLSON IS THE man raising the hammer. Most recognize Carlson as the handsome goof who, with his waspish wave of chestnut hair, must surely have been lost on his way to Cape Cod when he stumbled into the CNN studios in the early 2000s. Or they recall the embarrassments: Jon Stewart calling him a "dick" or the disastrous shuffle-hobble that led to a first-round elimination on *Dancing with the Stars* in 2006. There is even half a season of an unaired game show Carlson hosted floating around with the unsettling title of *Do You Trust Me?* In a 2010 *New Republic* profile, Jason Zengerle wrote that journalists everywhere could console themselves in their darkest hours with this thought alone: "At least I'm not Tucker Carlson."

What often gets lost in that parade of cheesy grins and cha-cha-chas are memories of features he penned for *The Weekly Standard*, *Esquire*, and famously, his brutal 1999 profile of George W. Bush in *Talk*. It's a track record of good—great, even—reporting that draws praise from all sides. Breitbart says he "fell in love" with Carlson's work at the *Standard*, describing a piece exposing the cluelessness of celebrities supporting death-row inmate Mumia Abu-Jamal as "a howler." Carlson's *Esquire* editor Mark Warren describes him as "an exceptionally talented writer... especially coming from Washington."

After beginning his career at the Hoover Institution's *Policy Review*, and a stint writing editorials for the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, Carlson was given room to write features at Bill Kristol's *Weekly Standard*. There, from 1995 to 2000, he produced some of the era's most interesting and offbeat conservative reporting. There was his dive into the Miami community where the Elian Gonzalez drama played out; and in 2000, a 4,600-word patchwork of his time amid the booze-soaked juvenilia of McCain's first presidential campaign. In it, Carlson manages an arresting summation of one of our most overanalyzed politicians: "McCain can accuse a person of subverting democracy and grin as he says it, all without being phony or disingenuous. He can rant about the evils of the special interests as he cheerfully attempts to eat an éclair with a plastic spoon. I've seen him do it. John McCain is a happy warrior, maybe the only one in American politics."

Carlson comfortably segued into TV. After many appearances—"If O. J. Simpson hadn't murdered his wife, I probably wouldn't be working in television," he wrote in his book—he

landed on a new weeknight CNN show, *The Spin Room*, in 2000. Co-hosted by Bill Press, it has been variously described as “cult” (by Press) and “the worst show in the history of television” (in *Esquire*; Salon settled for “the worst show in the history of CNN”). The *Room* stopped spinning after less than a year, and Carlson moved to *Crossfire* and then to MSNBC, where he hosted the network’s *Tucker* until 2008.

Through it all, he continued writing, picking up a 2004 National Magazine Award nomination for a trippy *Esquire* feature chronicling a peace mission to Liberia led by Al Sharpton. But by 2009, when he landed at his natural home, Fox News, impressions of Carlson as an unserious cable guy had calcified in some corners. *New York Times* TV critic Alessandra Stanley judged that Carlson, who had once seemed like “a brainy young contrarian... a Junior Miss version of George Will”—had become by the mid-2000s a “George Will o’ the Wisp; his opinions are loud but ever more vaporous.”

REGARDLESS OF ITS JOURNALISTIC QUALITY, THE CALLER has been more of a ratings success than any of Carlson’s TV shows. According to figures provided by the site, it drew 550,000 unique visitors in its first month. By this March it had 2 million-plus. Page views have gone from 3.2 million to 11.1 million in the same period. Those figures are modest by Huffington Post standards—35.6 million unique visitors in May, according to comScore—and the Caller has yet to turn a profit. But the fledgling site with a small staff is the 780th most visited website in the US, according to June ratings from Quantcast, putting it ahead of big names like *Vanity Fair* and *National Review*.

What’s driving the clicks? That depends who you ask. To the Caller’s fans, Carlson’s site is a hero, sticking it to the Left, yes, but also digging into the Tea Party/establishment schism on the Right. Want to know what establishment GOP candidate Jon Huntsman thinks of Obama? The Caller uncovered the loving letters that may sway your vote. Carlson says the original reports—which make up 70 to 80 percent of homepage stories—“get multiples of the traffic of an aggregated story.”

But there are those who see Carlson’s latest product very differently. Markos Moulitsas, founder of the liberal site DailyKos, wrote in an e-mail: “Given that much of the site’s growth has come from gimmicks like hiring Ginni Thomas, I’d say their traffic growth has come from the same kind of ideological stunts that have driven Andrew Breitbart’s growth.” Following the Caller’s accusation that *National Review* had “prearranged” its positive editorial on the GOP’s Pledge to America—in fact, it had simply been leaked a copy of the pledge and told Republicans it liked it—*The New Republic*’s Jonathan Chait wrote that “the DC’s ‘reporting’ should be viewed more as a marketing strategy for itself than actual journalism.”

That “marketing strategy” might include this March’s publication of James O’Keefe’s undercover video showing an NPR fundraiser deriding Republicans and bragging that the network could survive without government funds. The blow was undercut when *The Blaze*—yes, Glenn Beck’s website—watched the raw tapes and proved the video the Caller posted

was misleadingly edited. Was Carlson endorsing deceptive reporting? The Caller did not produce the video, only reported on it, he says. And allowing for the fact that the site was the first media outlet to disseminate the video—and was richly rewarded for its efforts with web traffic—this is technically true. Carlson also insists the editing did not change the video’s substance. “Having been around a lot of stories, packages, and documentaries as they’re being made, I can tell you it was a very brave thing of O’Keefe to release the entire video. When was the last time you saw *Dateline NBC* do that?”

But for marketing buzz—and ethical conundrums—it’s hard to go past the Caller’s Journalist series. The nominally off-the-record Google Groups forum featured over four hundred left-leaning journalists, wonks, and academics, talking everything from caucuses to basketball brackets, and had been the subject of whispers since Ezra Klein, then blogging for *The American Prospect*, started it in early 2007. It was perhaps inevitable that it would leak and, last June, media gossip site FishbowlDC published e-mails from Weigel, then a *Washington Post* blogger, to the listserv. Among other things, the *Post*’s man on the conservative beat had called Ron Paul supporters “Paultard Tea Party people.” Weigel resigned from the *Post*; Klein disbanded the listserv.

Daily Caller reporter Jonathan Strong got hold of the archive around this time and began sorting through it. In July, The Caller published an enfilade of Journalist pieces claiming left-wing journalists had colluded to get Obama elected. Headlines included: “Documents show media plotting to kill stories about Rev. Jeremiah Wright” and “The Fix was in: Journalist e-mails reveal how the liberal media shaped the 2008 election.” A then-unprecedented 1.35 million unique visitors loaded the Caller that month.

At first glance, the Journalist stories fit precisely the mold Carlson had set at CPAC, a sharp right hook to the mainstream media thrown with reportorial heft. But as the series rolled out, it looked more like the Caller was swinging at air. Those on the exposed list cried foul; the series lacked any semblance of context, critics said, and omitted vital information. Sour grapes? Possibly. But the offended Journalists had a point.

First, several of Strong’s pieces play what Klein, now at *The Washington Post*, calls a “shell-game,” with the most flagrant example being the story claiming the media plotted to “kill stories about Rev. Jeremiah Wright.” Ledes target the “media” and mainstream outlets, but go on to cite the more egregious comments of openly ideological writers from publications like *The Nation*. For the Wright story, Strong drew on comments made by Spencer Ackerman, then of the avowedly liberal *Washington Independent*, who suggested calling Obama’s critics racists in a listserv debate about the reverend.

Strong says via e-mail that when the Caller wrote reporters “participated in outpourings of anger”—as it did in the Wright story, naming Politico and *Time*—it was “because someone from that organization had chimed in during an outpouring of anger.” He does not define “chime in” though, and nowhere in the Wright story does he cite a specific Politico or *Time* reporter doing it. “When a reporter suggests leveling accusations of racism at random [people] to help a political candidate win an election,” Strong adds,

"there is some guilt by association, even given the caveats of the listserv medium." But consider that Weigel says that he sometimes has an inbox with 25,000 unread e-mails. Guilt by association with any of them would be difficult to prove.

Other journalists were quoted completely out of context. In a *Caller* story about a *Journalist* discussion on whether Fox News should be censored, *Time* White House correspondent Michael Scherer was quoted writing "I agree" following a paragraph outlining a suggestion the US needed tougher libel laws. Scherer told *Politico* that he had actually been agreeing with an e-mail not cited in Strong's story and was arguing *against* further media restrictions. (Only later in the original story, far from the "I agree" quote, were Scherer's true concerns acknowledged.) The *Caller* updated the story, with no acknowledgment that text had been changed, adding this: "*Time*'s Scherer, who had seemed to express support for increased regulation at Fox, suddenly appeared to have qualms." "Seemed" appears to suggest they couldn't let the falsehood go.

The series also left something many readers would have found relevant unsaid: Carlson himself had asked Klein to join the list—members rejected the idea—and *Caller* reporter Gautham Nagesh, who had left the site in April, just before the series, had been on *Journalist*.

Carlson has answers for his critics. Why didn't he publish the entire archive, as some reporters on the Left and Right had demanded? "A fair criticism," he admits, before insisting the petty bitchiness of some comments would have been too embarrassing and too banal. "Trust me, we could have written a lot more *Journalist* stories." Why not publish an opener that explained the fragmented nature of a listserv more fully? "You don't lead the paper with all the people who didn't commit crimes that day." Why not mention Nagesh? "Our employee on *Journalist* was long gone before I discovered what *Journalist* was. That's true."

Truth-y. Michael Calderone's widely read *Politico* story unmasking details of *Journalist* ran about a year before Nagesh's departure. And Strong claims that Nagesh's participation was widely known in the newsroom, and that "the whole reason" the *Caller* pursued the story was because Nagesh "spent hours talking about how scandalized he was by *Journalist* and what people said on it." Tucker insists he was not a part of these conversations; Nagesh, now with *The Hill*, declines to comment.

The series may have lost Carlson the trust of Beltway types. "I've never dealt with someone who was quite so opportunistically mendacious as Carlson was here," says Klein. But it may have strengthened Carlson's connection with another audience: the Tea Party types who applaud the site's anti-establishment tone. "The establishment never gave us any help," vamps Carlson, who, alongside Cheney's former senior aide, built the *Caller* with support from that big-time GOP donor. "I've never been all that pro-establishment in any context really."

The *Journalist* coverage was a story tailor-made for that distrustful grassroots corner of the conservative movement, elements of which hooted Carlson's CPAC speech: yes, the media are twisted, the stories said, and here's your twisted proof.

WHEN KEITH OLBERMANN WAS BRIEFLY SUSPENDED FROM MSNBC last year for donating to Democratic campaigns, Stu Bykofsky, a columnist for *Philadelphia Daily News*, sent an e-mail to keith@keitholbermann.com seeking comment. Bykofsky was unaware that months before, Carlson had bought Olbermann's domain name, and with it the e-mail address, on a lark. Carlson, playing the part of Olbermann, got into a testy back-and-forth—"Dear Stu, since you're obviously a moron..."—that was published on Philadelphia gossip site Phawker.

"I just couldn't help it," says Carlson. "I think it's important to do things every once in a while purely because they amuse you."

The lure of the prank has been strong throughout Carlson's career. Some of his best pieces carry a joker's sensibility: in an elegy for Hunter S. Thompson he describes collecting his *Fear and Loathing* stash and smoking, snorting, and swallowing his way through it before heading to college. *The Spin Room* was one big joke on more earnest cable news fare. Off screen, his early form letter response to nasty mail at CNN was a brief "fuck you"; when *Politico*'s Ben Smith wrote that the *Caller* was "struggling" Carlson sent a similar note. "I'm all for pith," he tells me. *Journalists* will chuckle—or recoil—to hear he almost named his site Punji Stick, after the sharpened bamboo spears the Viet Cong deployed in mantraps.

Is Tucker Carlson joking now? It's hard to tell. He makes an obvious point when talking about his own writing that applies to writing about him: "Nobody is monochromatic." That may be a trite platitude—it came in a long soliloquy on how he aged out of writing hit-jobs that this profiler took as a warning—but I remember the line when a man introduces himself to Carlson on the elevator by saying, "I told my mother I worked in the same building as you and she didn't talk to me for a month." Because to sit and listen to him for two hours, without the cameras, Carlson is more the guy you take home to mom than offend her with. Smart, funny, generous—he insists I take a square of the Nicorette he ceaselessly chews, even though I've never smoked—and a libertarian with far less truck for the GOP than you might expect.

But this is the Carlson who promised a site that would mimic one of the finest truth-telling enterprises in American journalism. And what he's delivered hasn't cleared the fog of bow ties and smarm that has allowed his critics to see him as what his good friend Labash describes as "the villain in a John Hughes movie." Someone for whom the audience hisses on cue the moment he comes into frame.

Carlson isn't going to let a hostile audience unnerve him. He is convinced that the *Caller* is a success, and says the failings in his career for which he has been much lampooned have been instrumental in making it one. "Success doesn't force you into introspection," he says. "It allows you to skate around the basic questions in life: What am I capable of? And more to the point, What am I incapable of? Only failure makes you answer those questions." **CJR**

JOEL MEARES is an assistant editor at *CJR*.



# John Paton's Big Bet

*Can Journal Register's 'Digital First' mindset bring enough ads to avoid a date with doom?*

BY LAUREN KIRCHNER

"We're no good at this," John Paton says, sitting in a midtown Manhattan conference room on a gray, rainy spring day. "We" is the news business, and "this" is designing a viable future for it. "We have to figure it out." He leans forward in his chair and adjusts his blue Hermès tie. "If this business model's not fixed, the amount of American daily newspapers that won't be here in five years will stagger you. They won't make it." The reporters and editors at

Journal Register Company—a chain of eighteen daily newspapers and 176 non-daily newspapers, magazines, and websites in small markets throughout the Midwest and Northeast—should know. Paton took over as CEO of the company in February 2010 when the previously public company emerged out of bankruptcy as a private one.

Since then, Paton has engineered a radical makeover of JRC's previous image as an old-fashioned, bottom-of-the-barrel corporate chain. He's attracted industry attention for hiring digital big-thinkers like Columbia University's Emily Bell, CUNY's Jeff Jarvis, and NYU's Jay Rosen to his advisory board. He's stressed a culture of transparency, community engagement, slashing costs without any layoffs in editorial or sales, and, above all, an upending of the daily news production process that he says is a byproduct of a print schedule that is irrelevant by now.

"Digital first, print last" is the new JRC motto—that's the

order in which readers want the news, and so that should be the order in which outlets publish it. Paton hopes this culture change won't just revitalize newspapers' relationships with their readers; it's his bet to push digital income high enough to replace the print revenue that he says will inevitably disappear.

The newspaper industry's print ad revenue reached a peak in 2000, after climbing for most of its history. Weighed down in part by a recession, it has plummeted since 2007. By 2010, print ad revenue was half what it was five years earlier. Digital ad sales, meanwhile, have not filled the gap; industry-wide, digital ads still only account for a mere 15 percent of ad revenue overall, according to the Newspaper Association of America.

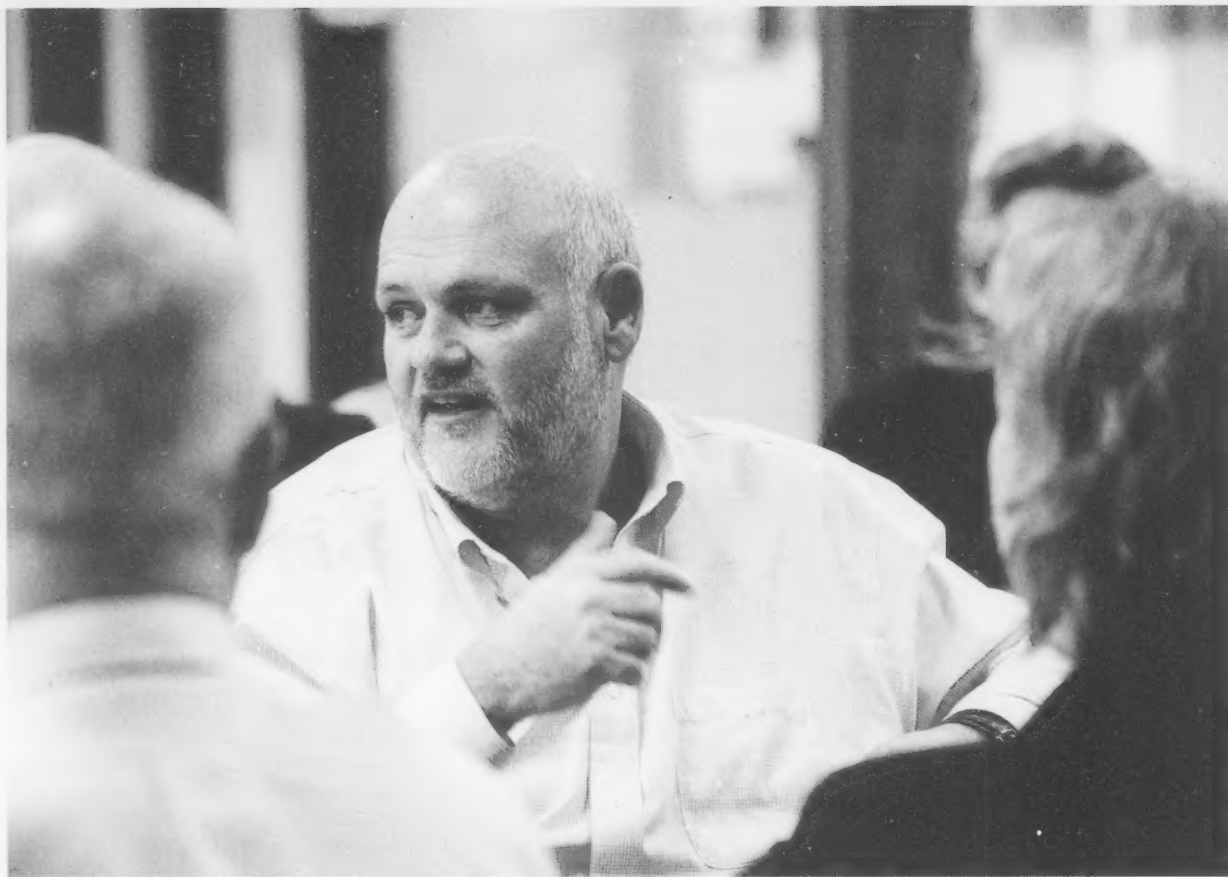
In the first quarter of 2011, following a year of dramatic reinvention at JRC, unique visitors were up 58 percent and page views up 31 percent from the first quarter of 2010. Although he will not disclose dollar figures, Paton admits that JRC's print ad revenue was down 7 percent for that period, but points to a 67 percent increase in digital ad revenue. He also says digital sales accounted for 15 percent of all ad revenue, bringing that ratio up to the industry average. Before Paton's takeover, ad sales had been only 6 percent digital. Shortly after taking charge, Paton told his staff that he wanted digital ad revenue to account for 25 percent of the company's cash flow, expressed as EBITDA—an accounting measure of earnings that excludes taxes, interest costs, and other expenses—by 2013. Two years after that,

the goal is 50 percent. This June, Paton said it stood at about 10 percent.

Given the rate of plummeting print revenues generally, Paton argues it's a matter of simple math to predict when any newspaper may have to close its doors if that revenue is not replaced. "Digital First" is Paton's gamble that his papers will be among the ones that make it. "The sense of urgency at JRC is profound. I might run out of time. I mean, that's an honest and obvious question," he admits. But to his colleagues at newspapers who aren't trying something like "Digital First," he offers a wager: "I bet you my time is longer than yours."

## A Company Transformed

Paton hardly could have picked a less likely company in which to play out his—or anyone's—experiments in news innovation. From the beginning, JRC had a reputation in the



**Man with a plan?** John Paton meets with JRC advisory board members in the Torrington, Connecticut, *Register Citizen* newsroom.

business for being a penny-pinching corporate chain, headed up by a bunch of bankers who, starting in 1990, bought clusters of family-owned, small-town newspapers and made huge profits by cutting costs. And those cuts tended to come in the newsroom. When print ads took a nosedive in 2007 and 2008, there was nothing left to cut. JRC went into bankruptcy in 2009 with \$692 million in debt.

Alan D. Mutter, newspaper consultant and author of the *Reflections of a Newsosaur* blog, observes that under its previous management, JRC was a company ahead of its time, but for all the wrong reasons. He says of its first CEO, Bob Jelenic: "His approach to the newspaper business of trying to maximize profitability by putting out the minimally good-enough product really foreshadowed what's happening broadly in the industry today." Mutter remembers that JRC's profit margins in the nineties were notably high, even compared to the cash machines that newspaper companies then were. Jelenic was cinching the belt "before it was necessary or fashionable."

JRC employees say that Jelenic's ruthlessness took its toll on both their morale and their product. There are stories of him summoning under-performing managers to the local airport, where he would fire them from the tarmac without

stepping out of the corporate jet. When cancer killed Jelenic in 2008, his former employees used a Yahoo message board to express their lack of sympathy. The board has since been taken down, but a Gawker piece at the time—"Employees Spit On Newspaper CEO's Grave"—captured a taste of the vitriol. "Ding-dong, the witch is dead" was a characteristic comment, though there were much worse.

Employees also recall how Jelenic, convinced that putting content online would threaten sales of the print paper, put a strict limit on how many stories went up on the websites each day. According to Glenn Gilbert, executive editor of Michigan's *Oakland Press*, who has been with the company for nineteen years, "There was probably no newspaper company more backward in its approach to digital media. Our websites were a complete afterthought." Not that the staff would have had the tools to keep up with the digital revolution even if they had been allowed to do so. Another editor says that, until last year, he had been working on a 1994 Mac with a floppy drive; he could barely visit his own newspaper's website.

JRC finally filed for Chapter 11 protection in February 2009, emerging that August as a private company. Following the bankruptcy process, its equity holders included

lenders like GE Capital, JPMorgan, and Bank of America. Paton, who had first been brought on as a director to help create a plan of action, was then hired in January 2010 as CEO. (He also got a stake in the company, though he won't say how large.)

The challenges for Paton were clear. JRC came out of bankruptcy with \$225 million of debt, with infrastructure and technology that were appallingly out of date, and with a skeleton staff that was used to keeping quiet and not taking risks. JRC was so stripped down that it had nowhere to go but up. It was a blank slate for a new plan. Paton had one.

### Stacking Dimes, Pinching Pennies

At a conference JRC held in Philadelphia shortly after Paton took over, the new CEO delivered a PowerPoint presentation to the company's editors and management describing his business plan—a presentation that he also put up as the first post on his new company blog. To those who complained that digital ad prices were so low compared to print ads that it was like “trading dollars for dimes,” he retorted with his catchphrase, “Start stacking dimes.”

Those “dimes,” he told them, would come from new sources of online revenue that JRC had never produced or sold before. Meanwhile, Paton told his audience, he would slash infrastructure costs. He would soon shut down most of the papers' printing presses, mailrooms, and circulation departments, either outsourcing these operations or consolidating them to one paper in each geographic area. And staff members who were particularly adept in digital content or digital sales would be promoted.

“I went in knowing what I wanted to do,” Paton says, explaining that in his thirty-five years in the news business, he's seen print people in charge, print and digital operations segregated, and print and digital integrated. “The only thing I know that works is to put digital people in charge of all of the efforts to understand how news today is created and consumed.”

Paton remembers finishing his presentation and being met with silence. Several hundred employees in the audience stared at him—a slightly short, stout man with a short-trimmed white beard and blue eyes that are both friendly and intensely focused. He says, “They were like, ‘Who's the fat guy in the front telling us that we're broken? Who the fuck is he?’”

Paton, fifty-four, admits he has been called “arrogant,” his tone “dismissive.” But he attributes that to a conviction that comes from having seen the industry from every angle. Before joining JRC, he was the co-founder and CEO of ImpreMedia LLC, a chain of Spanish-language newspapers and websites. Before that, he worked his way up through the Canadian media, from a copy boy job at the *Toronto Sun* as a teenager, to publisher of Sun Media, with a dozen reporting and editing jobs in between.

With his message delivered, his “Ben Franklin Project” was the first major move to demonstrate how drastically he could cut production costs. The company-wide experiment required each JRC daily newspaper to put out one day's

issue—print and online—using only free online tools. Some of the tools were probably familiar (Google Docs, YouTube, CoverItLive), but others weren't (the photo-editing tool GIMP, the page-layout design program Scribus). Paton says he planned it for July 4th so JRC could “declare independence” from expensive proprietary software. When Paton first took over as CEO, he had estimated that he would need to spend \$25 million of the company's cash to upgrade its technology over the ensuing eighteen months—just to keep JRC functioning. He says that after “Ben Franklin,” the company was able to cut and re-negotiate vendor contracts, which played a large part in the reduction of that capital expenditure bill down to \$12 million.

But “Ben Franklin” wasn't just about software. Newsrooms were also encouraged to get costs down for that issue by soliciting as much user-generated content as they could, using social media and “town hall”-type events to invite readers into the information-gathering process. Many editors said that giving the project a company-wide deadline made the difference between talking about innovation and mandating it. “The result turned out to be marvelously profitable in the end for us ... but the most important thing we got out of it was culture change,” says Paton. “My guys are afraid of nothing.”

Another ongoing JRC experiment is the centralization of production of non-local pages among the chain's daily papers, so that each paper's editor won't have to select which AP wire stories will go on the “nation” page—one editor per state, or several states, can do it. The idea is to free up newsroom staff to focus on producing more local content—which in turn will attract more online traffic—without hiring more reporters. Content consolidation also includes partnerships with outside companies. JRC teamed up with The Street, a finance website, to share content and ad revenue, for instance: JRC provides local business stories to The Street, and The Street gives national ones to JRC.

A renewed emphasis on cheap, simple videos was the next step in Paton's plan. In a much publicized blitz, Paton handed out a thousand Flip cameras, encouraging JRC reporters to post videos for every story they wrote and encouraging the sales staff to monetize them. (That investment also required the purchase of hundreds of new computers, as most of JRC's old ones lacked the memory, or even the USB ports, to accommodate the cameras.) JRC is producing a thousand videos a week, and it has plans to launch a “JRC TV” site to stream videos from across the chain later this year. Paton attributes 10 percent of JRC's digital revenue growth to online video advertising.

These videos are unlikely to win awards—they might just be ten seconds of a wobbly view of cops standing around a car accident, or a nonsensical clip of a high school track practice. But editors say they are first trying to incorporate video into the daily routine; the quality, they hope, will follow. Emily Donohue, online editor at *The Saratogian* in upstate New York, says that she's gotten positive feedback; her readers enjoy seeing themselves, their kids, and their town reflected in the videos. “We're a community newspaper,” she says, “so that's kind of our bread and butter.”

Paton encouraged his publishers, editors, and reporters to

experiment with whatever might get readers clicking, watching, and engaged online. As an added incentive, Paton had his reporters and editors apply to be a part of the ideaLab, a small group chosen to get extra pay, equipment, and a few hours a week away from their daily responsibilities to play around with new web tools and methods for their newsrooms.

One ideaLab participant, Ivan Lajara of Kingston, New York's *Daily Freeman*, says that sometimes his paper's experiments are successful and sometimes they aren't. In April, Lajara used CoverItLive to capture reporter Patricia Doxsey's live tweets from a murder trial, and hundreds of readers participated in the discussion online. In addition to attracting traffic, the readers, in turn, helped Doxsey shape her coverage, as she learned what her readers found most interesting. Another experiment, the scannable quick response (QR) codes Lajara printed in the *Freeman* that would call up videos on readers' smartphones, proved less successful; with only a handful of hits, he decided it wasn't worth the effort. But he says he's excited by this new freedom to try things "without having to go through twenty layers of bureaucracy."

Such projects all had the goal of getting JRC papers in the habit of doing more with less, of drastically increasing the amount of content on their websites without increasing newsroom staff. That surge in content had the goal of bringing a larger audience to each site. And the growth of the audience, in turn, has the much more pressing goal: attracting advertisers.

### The Next Newsroom?

If Paton's staff stared blankly at him when he made his JRC debut, to a person they express enthusiasm about the direction the company is heading in. Mark Ranzenberger, online editor at *The Morning Sun* in central Michigan, says that the past year at JRC has shown him something he hadn't experienced in the previous two decades. "It is the excitement of trying something new," he says. "It is the challenge of a boss giving you permission to try stuff—and that has not been part of the culture of newspapers that I have seen."

Perhaps none of JRC's experiments has gotten as much industry attention as *The Register Citizen's* "Open Newsroom Project." Situated in Torrington, a small, ex-manufacturing town in northwest Connecticut with a population of about thirty-six thousand, the six-thousand circulation daily is what Paton says is the model—both business and architectural—for all of JRC's newsrooms in the future.

Torrington's newsroom resembles a public library or community center as much as a newsroom: it has free-access "blogging stations," microfilm machines with the paper's archives hooked up to a printer (also free) for genealogical and historical research, and local art on exhibit. Its conference rooms are available for local organizations to hold meetings, and reporters and editors teach classes all week on topics like online publishing, social media, and video.

Most striking in its dedication to openness and transparency to its readers, however, is the fact that *The Register Citizen* opens its daily editorial meeting to the public, and live-streams it as well. Online viewers often send feedback

through Twitter or a chatroom. And readers are encouraged to respond to stories published online, with corrections or additional context, via a new fact-check box below each post.

The staff of *The Register Citizen* is young, as it is in many small-market newspapers. Most of its reporters are in their twenties and half have been there for less than a year. One editor at JRC described her paper as a "teaching newspaper"—offering jobs with relatively low pay in smaller markets—that

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**'People forget that  
"Digital First" isn't a  
strategy for the future,  
it's a transition strategy.'**

attracts college graduates but doesn't necessarily keep them long. And for all the investment the new management has put into JRC, these have not necessarily included additional newsroom hires or pay raises.

"I'm pretty honest about our faults here with the community," says Matt DiRienzo, *The Register Citizen's* publisher. "Because why try to ignore it? They can read the papers and see the one-source story, or the misspelled name or whatever. We have the same problems all small papers have." So the open-newsroom initiative is undertaken in the spirit of increasing the paper's credibility with its readers—to demonstrate that the staff will take responsibility for its shortcomings and do the best job it can with admittedly limited resources.

Improving *The Register Citizen's* relationship with its community through its open newsroom project is not just an act of altruism; it's a business decision. If the paper can attract new bloggers with its computer workstations and free classes, it can help expand the website's coverage for no extra cost. Readers who visit editorial meetings often offer story ideas. Online editors constantly solicit readers' photos and contributions to stories and graphics like "What's the town's most dangerous intersection?" JRC reporters, after all, can't be everywhere.

### Today and Tomorrow

For all the talk of growing online content and ads at JRC, the truth remains that 85 percent of all of the company's ad revenue still comes from print—as is true for the industry average. Paton says he is confident that ratio will shift, but in the meantime, it's a delicate balance that JRC has to maintain: putting its staff's energy into the digital side of operations without neglecting the print side, where the bulk of the money is still made. So at the end of a long digital day, publishing news as it happens, in the new JRC model, short



to long, fast to slow—SMS alert, tweet, web post, web feature, photos, and videos—what does the print product actually look like?

“Most of our editors are veteran print people, and we’re learning as we go along,” says *Daily Freeman* publisher Ira Fufeld, who has worked at the paper since 1970. “It’s a lot of fun, but it’s posed challenges to us. What can we put in print that’s different from the web, with a staff that’s no greater than it was before we had a website?” Not to mention the fact that having the *Freeman*’s print operations moved offsite means that their daily print deadline is three hours earlier than it once was.

JRC editors say that if a story has been online all day and it’s about to go into the next day’s newspaper, ideally it will be filled out with more context and additional sources. “When I started at the paper I never thought I’d work on a story today and it would be old today,” says *New Haven Register* city reporter Angela Carter. “We have a product that comes out ‘tomorrow.’ And so I’m thinking now about how to keep things fresh, and how not to have my stories look like yesterday’s website.”

They also say cross-promotion between print and online is key. Just as print stories feature icons indicating that they have accompanying videos online, which drive readers to the website, websites also promote special print sections—a full-color pull-out Phillies schedule at the start of the baseball season, for instance, to encourage single-copy sales of the Delaware County, Pennsylvania *Daily Times*.

When asked about “Digital First,” Marshall Genger, one of Paton’s business partners from ImpreMedia, characterizes it as a useful catchphrase for an industry mired in tradition, but not as a literal business model—because you have to protect the bottom line, print. “Where ‘Digital First’ really takes traction is, in the newsroom, people need to be thinking differently,” says Genger. “And the only way you will get folks who never thought about anything other than the print side of the business, to get them to even recognize that the digital world exists, is to say, ‘you gotta think about this first.’ Only so that they can really think about it at all.”

### How Much Time?

Paton is being invited to a lot of conferences these days. This spring, he spoke at the Newspaper Association of America’s “mediaXchange” conference in Dallas and the paidContent conference in New York. He gave the keynote at last year’s *Editor & Publisher* Interactive Media conference in Las Vegas, and at this year’s World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers International Newsroom Summit in Zurich. The leaders of the news industry are eager to hear whether his “Digital First” plan of action is turning ideas into dollars.

Because JRC is now a private company, access to its finances are limited. This March, Paton reported a \$41 million yearly “profit” in 2010—for which he awarded his employees a bonus of an extra week’s pay—but that figure only accounts for the company’s EBIDTA, which is operating cashflow, not profit, and doesn’t include its hefty debt payments, taxes, and other key expenses. The most recent

figures JRC released compare the first quarter of 2011 to the first quarter of 2010; they show that JRC is selling ten times the number of digital ads per month that it was the previous year, and that the number of digital revenue streams has increased from around thirteen to about sixty. Most importantly, he says, more than two-thirds of that revenue is purely digital—rather than being part of a print-online sales bundle.

All of that growth adds up to a 67 percent increase in total digital revenue in a year. How much money does all of that actually add up to, and will it be able to make up for the loss in print ad revenue, which decreased by 7 percent in the same time period? JRC won’t release the hard numbers for the ad revenue overall, so it is hard to know. The relative change over the last year, at least, compares favorably to the industry overall. According to the NAA, the industry’s print revenue decreased by 9.5 percent from Q1 2010 to Q1 2011, but digital ad revenue only increased by 10.6 percent. And a calculation off those exact sales figures shows that, if the industry had increased digital and decreased print by the same percentages as JRC did, it would have successfully made up for the decline in print with its digital growth.

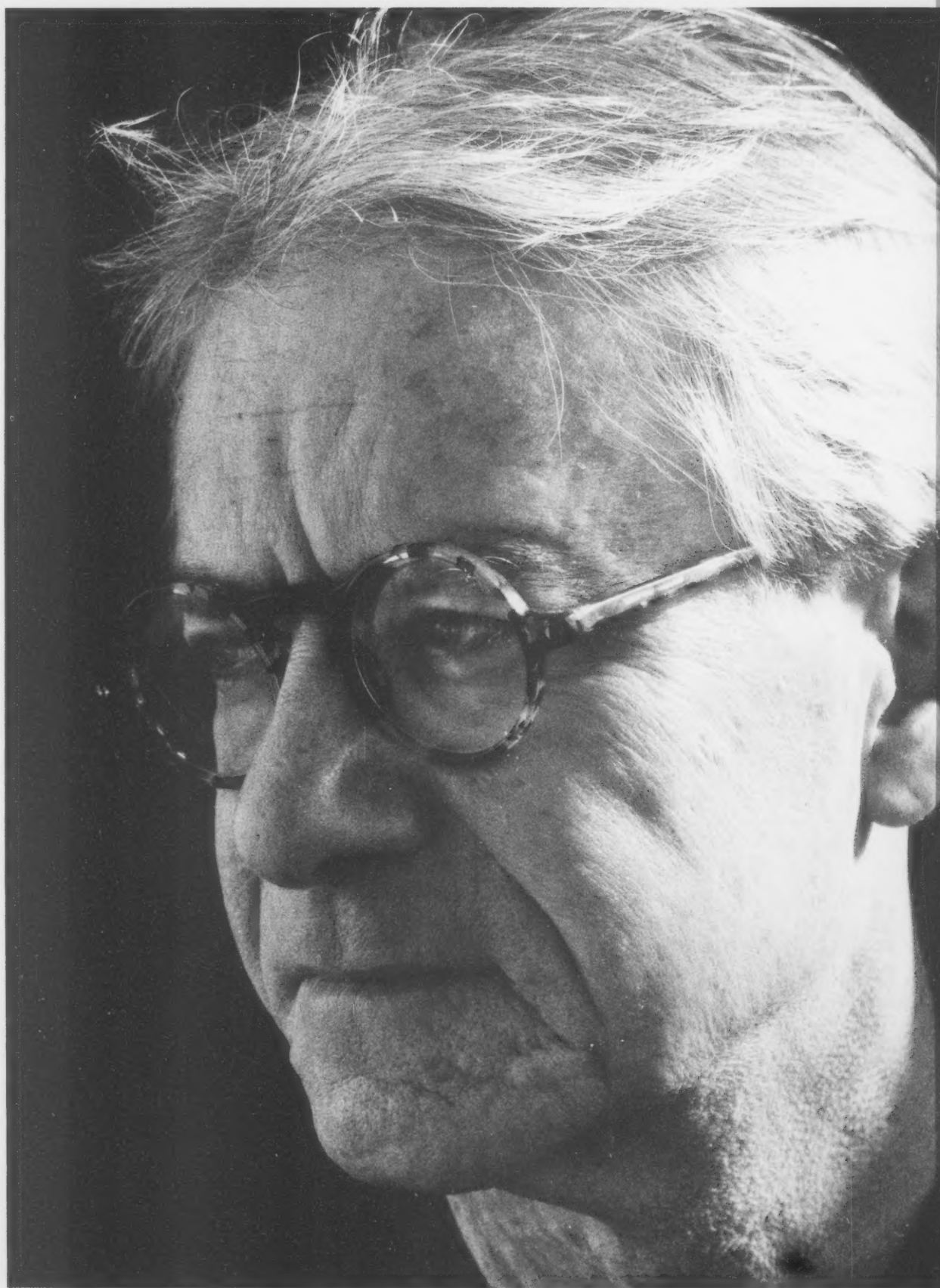
When NAA released those figures, Paton wrote in an e-mail: “An industry growing digital ads at about 10 percent is going to die. A company like ours growing digital ads at about 70 percent is going to make it.” He added that JRC was on track to be within a couple percentage points of replacing lost print ad revenue with its increased digital ad revenue this year.

But would it be possible for the rest of the industry to make such dramatic gains, when most companies are not starting from rock-bottom, as JRC was? And, assuming print revenue continues to slide, is it possible for JRC to continue to increase digital sales by such a large percentage for more than a few years? JRC has shown impressive revenue growth since Paton took over, but it’s much easier to grow quickly from a low base than it is to maintain that rate of growth.

Paton is as straightforward with his audiences, and with the press, as he is with his employees. He can’t predict the future, he says. “People forget that ‘Digital First’ isn’t a strategy for the future, it’s a transition strategy. It takes you from here to here, but it doesn’t tell you what ‘here’ looks like,” he says, tapping the table, indicating different points in time. “If we have one gift at all at JRC, it is that we’re flexible. We’re not trying to figure out every piece of this. And we’re not stymied into inaction, or forced into inaction, because we can’t figure out every piece of it.”

This attitude—Paton’s kind of enthusiastic, shrugging optimism for the future—has trickled down to his employees. “Now, your guess is as good as mine as to whether he’s got it right, whether anybody’s got it right.... If somebody had gotten it right, everybody would have replicated it,” says *Daily Freeman* managing editor Tony Adamis. “Do I know whether it will work or not? I have no idea. But you know what? I’m happy to come to work every day, knowing that this is the path that we’re taking, and we’ll see.” **CJR**

LAUREN KIRCHNER is an assistant editor at CJR.





# Ideas + Reviews

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## Punk's Prophet

*Through the distortion, Greil Marcus showed a new way to listen*

BY TIM MARCHMAN

Discounting cash-in reunions, studio sessions with bank robber Ronnie Biggs, and the like, The Sex Pistols last played in January 1978 at the Winterland Ballroom in San Francisco. Their useful life ended unimprovably, with singer Johnny Rotten asking the crowd, "Ever get the feeling you've been cheated?" and then stalking off the stage.

Among the crowd that night was Greil Marcus, a thirty-two-year-old critic and author on assignment for *Rolling Stone*. His review of the Winterland concert ran in the March 9, 1978 edition, which featured an alarmingly vacant Jane Fonda on the cover, and was perfunctory at best. In it, he praises the Pistols' energy and bravado, notes the bad behavior of certain attendees, and infers from Rotten's exit the conclusion, at long last, of a short, anomalous era in pop music.

An owlsh figure who studied political science as a graduate student at Berkeley and writes like it, Marcus, then as now, was known for his focus on the iconography and secret history of rock and roll. Marcus began writing about Bob Dylan in 1968, the exact point at which he lost his relevance, and Marcus has somehow managed to since write enough fawning prose about him to fill a recently released anthology that carries a shipping weight of 1.4 pounds—in addition to two other dense book-length studies. With that record, Marcus may have been the single critic in the United States least likely to write the best book about what punk rock meant and why, all these years later, anyone should care.

Peers and rivals such as Lester Bangs and Robert Christgau were so entranced by this music and the potential it held to redeem all the cashiered promises pop music made in the late 1960s—promises, essentially, that radio songs could create a new way of living, an escape from a world of slicks and frauds—that they seemed to remake themselves in response to it. Marcus was a more wary figure. He was seemingly more comfortable with old, forgotten blues and folk records than with the Billboard 100, and certainly not one to attempt, as Bangs did, to himself become one of the madding crowd. In his review of the Pistols' last show, there is a tangible feeling of unease, a sense that this was not a place he was meant to be.

And yet, perhaps because punk traded so heavily on such feelings of discomfiture, it was in fact his perfect match. Originally published in 1993, Marcus's *Ranters and Crowd Pleasers: Punk in Pop Music, 1977–92* is a collection of occasional journalism comprising dozens of columns and features written for such outlets as *Rolling Stone*, *The Village Voice*, and *Artforum*. It is the one book to read if you want to really know about punk.

So far as punk was anything more than pop style—and most of even the good stuff was not—it was a response to a question: If you could say anything, what would it be? Today, that question doesn't carry the same implications it once did, but the brief early glory that ended on stage at the Winterland Ballroom represented the temporary triumph of inarticulate free expression over a world dominated by glad-handers and smooth-talkers. It may be that there were no more than a half dozen great records among hundreds in that first wave; the point was that the records were real at all. Their very existence spelled out a horrifically loud rejection of all sorts of smug mendacity. Anyone can be a musician, they said. You don't need fancy clothes and a contract. You don't even have to know how to play.

The main line on punk ends in its total, miserable failure. As it turns out, most people who make a fetish of amateurism are making excuses to stall for time while they learn what they're doing. Steve Jones, the Pistols' guitarist, went on to a career as a Los Angeles session man, a real pro who landed numbers on *Miami Vice* soundtracks and actually started up a band called The Professionals. This wasn't selling out. This is who he was all along, and so too most of his peers and progeny, who mustered up the guts to say something only to find they had nothing at all to say.

Most of the writing on punk holds that it was, ultimately, a glimpse at an uncompromising future that never actually arrived. Unlike Bangs and Christgau, though, who loved punk for what it wasn't—soft, slow, tentative—Marcus saw it for what it actually was. For him it was a sensibility, and not a theory, one that more than anything was about a vague sense that the world was not as it should be. And this is likely why he was one of the few to notice that the Winterland show was not the end of anything at all.

PUNK—CALL IT LOUD, FAST ROCK AND roll played in the mid- to late-1970s by the first generation to whom Bob Dylan and The Beatles were hoary old relics—was a lot of things. It was the inevitable result of some of the stranger musical experiments of the 1960s and the inven-

**Marcus was never put out by punk's revolutionary posturing, and never fixed on hair dye, safety pins, and moral panic as being anything worth much thought.**

tion of cheap recording technology; it was an inchoate reaction to the same anxieties that would soon put Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in office; it was the perfect cultural expression of eternal adolescent alienation; it was a fad. For a few months in 1976 and 1977, the papers and the television carried ominous warnings about feral youths listening to incomprehensible ranters who dyed their hair green and wanted to overthrow the government and set everything on fire. The Sex Pistols, who denounced the Queen as not even being human, were banned from the British airwaves; rock critics briefly exulted and then forgot about the whole thing.

Marcus shows no real concern with those few brief months in 1977 when punk was capital-I Important and every broadcast in England led with a picture of some young unfortunate with a safety pin through his face. Nor does he have anything much to say about the parallel scene in downtown New York, where, he notes, "most punks seemed to be auditioning for careers as something else." He has little interest, in fact, in most of the canonical punk rock with which I was obsessed at age fourteen, when I cajoled my mother into buying this book for me, and with which any number of fourteen-year-olds are probably just as obsessed right now: Television, Minor Threat, Hüsker Dü, and the Minutemen aren't mentioned at all, and the Ramones once, in a passing reference to their tiresome shtick.

What does interest him is a lot of strange music of which I'd never heard. Much of it I wouldn't discover for many years, partly because many of the records were, quaint as it seems today, physically unavailable in the United States at a price I could pay, and partly because the heterodoxy of what he

was describing was just intimidating: it was music I'd never heard anyone else speak up for, which seemed to come from a world at a right angle to the one I knew. Most of what he recommended was quite brilliant. These were (mainly) English groups with such fantastical names as Essential Logic ("imagine Alice forced to get a band together and play for the Red Queen ... a modest, perfectly intentional demolition of the ability to take anything at face value"), Delta 5 (they "accept the inevitability of love but maintain their suspicions"), Gang of Four ("leisure as oppression, identity as product"), and The Mekons ("collective self-realization through playful art against a backdrop of social strife").

Where the acts that I was listening to were generally working minor variations on a single theme of loud solipsism, these groups were imagining, and creating, a small and temporary utopia in short bursts, the place the singer Poly Styrene described when she sang about x-rays penetrating through a latex breeze. If I'd had the ear for them, I would have heard a way out of the charmless narcissism that had me holed up in my bedroom with Minor Threat blaring through my headphones. I didn't, but then few people did. Marcus was one of them.

More alienated and politically astute than his fellow critics, Marcus was never put out by punk's revolutionary posturing, and so never fixed on hair dye, safety pins, and moral panic as being anything worth much thought. He took anarchism and bad fashion as given, and kept listening after the scabrous youth of London were done with their fourteen minutes. What he heard showed that the conventional line on the music was totally wrong. The safety-pinned kids may have failed



to do whatever it was they were supposed to do—overthrow the British monarchy? kill bad radio forever?—but it was exactly at this point that punk became interesting.

THERE WERE A LOT OF PEOPLE IN places like London, Leeds, and Los Angeles who did have something to say after all, and found in the music an idiom in which they could say it. “The story,” Marcus writes, “was always the same: the music made a promise that things did not have to be as they seemed, and some brave people set out to keep that promise for themselves.”

Take The Mekons. They started in 1977 at the University of Leeds as strictly a joke, more a students’ collective of almost two dozen pranksters and semi-musicians than a proper group. They vowed that they would never record, allow themselves to be photographed, or give interviews, and then cheerfully did all of it. They brought a couch inscribed with the word “space-ship” on stage with them. They sang absurd songs—their first single, “Never Been In A Riot,” consisted of a couple of chords and a drum roll, sounded like sucking the pulp out of a dead tooth, and was chiefly concerned with mocking The Clash’s risible claim to want a “White Riot.” (The Mekons did actually end up in a riot, fighting off a neo-fascist attack on a gay bar they frequented, which made the joke even better.) Beside this utter incompetence, the Pistols may as well have been Led Zeppelin or King Crimson.

The Clash, the most successful of the original punk bands, had slogans, communiqués, a tune in which they elevated an arrest for shooting pigeons into a cosmic attack on the idea of representative democracy. The Mekons had principles: “that anybody could do it; that we didn’t want to be stars; that there was no set group as such, anybody could get up and join in and instruments would be swapped around; that there’d be no distance between the audience and the band; that we were nobody special,” as guitarist Kevin Lycett once told the writer Simon Reynolds. What was in the hands of a great and yet thoroughly conventional band like The Clash a set of contrived rebel postures was something

quite different for The Mekons. They actually meant what they were saying.

For Marcus, intensely focused as he was on music by people who quite deliberately had nothing to say at all, this sort of thing clearly came as true revelation. The old folk and blues acts with which he was obsessed meant nothing they said and probably paid it no attention; their lyrics were dusty inheritances. Their descendants, such as Dylan and The Band, loved dramatic poses and the sound of words. They were performers, assuming transient roles for the benefit of an audience.

For The Mekons, quite the opposite was true. They had no idea how to perform, no notion of what it meant; crude as it was, their music was pure, direct reaction to a time of upheaval. In it, Marcus heard “some hint here, some fragmentary cultural memory, of the

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### **‘Don’t romanticize it,’ Marcus is warned; he admirably fails.**

Ranters, the possessed and sometimes naked heretics who defined the farthest reaches of extremism during the English Civil War.”

There is no such distance in his reaction to Gang of Four. The first time he saw them live, he reports, he left directly after their set despite having wanted to hear the headlining Buzzcocks for years. “I didn’t,” he writes, “want anything to interfere with what had just happened.” This was September 1979, and he had just seen probably the strongest group in the world, one which utterly overwhelmed him even before he could really understand what they were saying.

Preposterously, these four handsome young men had not only perfected an original and fantastically danceable sound that somehow married the bass-led rhythms of Jamaican dub to the jagged guitar of The Velvet Underground and was immediately identifiable as the

purest sort of punk—while being clearly suited for radio. (While they were never much commercially, their style has underwritten numerous popular acts over the years.) They were also avowed neo-Marxists, steeped in the Frankfurt School and wary of the notion of individuality. A critic of Marcus’s dispositions could want little more.

“If this is the future of rock, I can’t wait,” Marcus wrote. Within months of first seeing the group he made his way to England to join them on tour and to report on what he called, with no evident irony, “Britain’s postpunk pop avant-garde.” “Don’t romanticize it,” he is warned by the head of Rough Trade, a leading label; he admirably fails.

The resulting long dispatch is the heart of the book. In it he sees a performance at a venue promoting a “Chile Solidarity Disco,” is lectured by an all-female quartet, The Raincoats, on the ways in which rock is inextricably bound to “the exclusion of women and the ghettoization of blacks,” comes to understand the financial structure of an independent record label, talks to the marvelous nineteen-year-old singer and saxophonist Lora Logic about punk as self-invention, and after asking the same pretentious questions I would like to have asked them, comes to understand Gang of Four as “the voice of false consciousness in rebellion against itself, and, almost simultaneously, the voice of resistance to that rebellion, the voice of a yearning for accommodation.” This was, in every way, a group that fulfilled every promise ever made on The Sex Pistols’ behalf.

None of it mattered for those who didn’t do their own digging in the days before Google and torrent sites, when the surface was not easily chipped, and this is the source, presumably, of much of Marcus’s desperate energy and passion. He wanted people to know how good Gang of Four were; he wanted them to be popular. One would not write this way about a fringe act today, when there is no broad consensus and even the most saleable act aims only to hit a niche, but there was a sort of bravery in Marcus’s exertions. Other critics wanted to change what people heard; Marcus wanted people to change the way they heard.

He, and the band's other backers, failed: among people who care about such things, Gang of Four is hardly any kind of obscurity, but they topped out at number fifty-eight on the UK charts and did even worse in the States. This was, writ small, the failure of punk, which was after all a popular form and not a pretext for referencing Theodor Adorno. Even when its best got everything perfectly right, no one really cared.

THIS WAS ON SOME LEVEL THE SUBJECT of what was probably punk's finest moment, The Mekons' 1985 return from oblivion with *Fear and Whiskey*, in my opinion the best record of that decade. It is a lot of things: a great collection of drinking songs, a dark meditation on the death of labor and of the promise of America, and the first and best and most convincing of what would eventually be far too many fusions of punk rock and country. (The Mekons sold even less than Gang of Four, but are just as responsible for vast amounts of terrible music made by other people.)

As Marcus writes, this record "carries an unmistakable undertone of self-mockery, of humiliation, of shame, because it cannot count. *Fear and Whiskey* is just fear and whiskey, nervousness and oblivion; it is the music of people who are sure that the world they cannot change will never find a place for them, that what they have to say will never be heard." It is the best record about a terribly modern fear, that in the vast cacophony of people liberated to say whatever it is they feel they need to say, no one will ever hear what you have to say.

Improbably, given The Mekons' origins as the sloppiest and most amateurish band in the world, *Fear and Whiskey* was just the first of an uninterrupted string of wonderful records that continues to this day. They are not really a going concern and not quite a business, but every so often they take a short tour or release a new record, and their audience, which barely rises to the size of a cult, takes it as a gift. All along that was the future of rock: a great old band in a small club, cheerfully oblivious to their utter obscurity and everything but their lives and what compelled them to start in on music at all.

Marcus never comes to a direct answer to the question of whether this is failure, and if so what kind it is, but he does offer an oblique one. Along with The Mekons and The Clash and a host of other groups, many of them just the kind I admired most at age fourteen (X, Sonic

way to the latest interview with Jackson Browne is perhaps unusually sympathetic.) And there is a real victory in freeing oneself from the need for validation, in being content with an audience that may be small but has ears to hear you.

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**It says a lot about the power of this music that it forced Marcus to remember, and to show just how sharp a thinker he can be at his best.**

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Youth, Black Flag), these pieces trace the careers of two singers who were, at most, fellow travelers: Elvis Costello and Bruce Springsteen, the crowd pleasers of the title. In Costello, he sees someone trying and failing to express a single idea of surpassing importance: "that fascism, far from being defeated in 1945, simply went underground, where it now functions as the political unconscious of the West." In Springsteen, he sees something like the living embodiment of rock music, his anthemic treatments of working class immiseration and his stark acoustic ballads of murder on the high plains the natural and fitting obverse of, say, The Mekons' obsession with striking coal miners.

"The Sex Pistols' first achievement," he writes in his introduction, "was to burn rock 'n' roll down to essentials of noise; if punk ever really ended, it was in the middle of its tale, when two singers from whom most punk chroniclers would withhold the name burned punk down to something close to silence." It is a striking claim, and in it one can just discern an answer to the problem posed by The Mekons. There is a worse thing than not to be heard and to not have an audience, it would go; it is to be heard and not understood, to have a vast audience that simply doesn't care what you have to say. (This is a fate with which a *Rolling Stone* writer whose intricate, dense articles on various rock genealogies are skimmed or skipped by millions of subscribers eager to make their

For as long as he's been writing, Marcus has been generally less interested in his actual subjects than in the invention of resonant mythologies about them. This is dangerous for someone writing about simple music, and leaves him prone to unconvincing theoretical disquisitions on such ideas as how old Dylan records about getting drunk fit in a line tracing back to the Great Awakening. (*Lipstick Traces*, his other book on punk, shows the danger by tracing the connection between the Pistols and the French situationists; it is nowhere near as bracing as his reportage on the music.) It's one thing to write about pop records and live performances as if they are strictly cultural artifacts, and something very different to forget, as he sometimes has when not faced with the immediate presence of an act as powerful as Gang of Four, that this is a fiction and a contrivance.

It says a lot about the power of this music that it forced him to remember, and to show just how sharp a thinker he can be at his best. Perhaps fittingly, unlike several of his less compelling ones, this book has been flitting in and out of print in various editions and under various titles since it was published. Like its subjects, it hasn't been heard widely; one hopes it's heard well. **CJR**

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TIM MARCHMAN, a sportswriter, will be a 2012 Knight-Wallace Fellow at the University of Michigan.

# Let's Do the Time Warp Again

Wrestling with pop culture's recycling problem

BY NOEL MURRAY

I GREW UP IN THE 1970S AND '80S, SUR-  
rounded by living monuments to a past  
I didn't yet understand. I ate at chain  
restaurants where the walls were plas-  
tered with vintage 45s, and the tables  
covered with reproductions of turn-of-  
the-century patent-medicine ads. Art  
directors back then adored the Gay  
Nineties, while fashion designers loved  
the Roaring Twenties, and the whole of  
showbiz seemed intent on bringing back the fifties. Only later did I understand that  
this was recycled culture; and yet because these leftovers were such an integral  
part of my youth, I still pine for them. Cartoonist Daniel Clowes once predicted  
that in the future we'd have nostalgia for the nostalgia of the past. So who's your  
favorite fifties icon? Henry Winkler or Brian Setzer?

**Retromania: Pop Culture's  
Addiction to Its Own Past**

By Simon Reynolds  
Faber and Faber, Inc.  
458 pages, \$16

Critic Simon Reynolds frets over this phenomenon in *Retromania: Pop Culture's  
Addiction to Its Own Past*. He worries about the cultural disengagement of people  
who fetishize a filtered version of history—like the ones who prefer their fifties  
the way Sha Na Na delivered it, as a pulp greaser fantasy, at once faster, louder,  
and more choreographed than it actually was. Reynolds also wonders about ob-  
sessives who cling to the past's version of the future—that never-was world of  
rocket-cars and analog synthesizers—and attempts to understand all those ob-  
scurants who busy themselves classifying and sub-classifying older sounds and  
styles. These folks frighten Reynolds. What's to become of popular culture if no  
one really wants to discover anything new?

*Retromania* is ostensibly a 450-page essay divided into a dozen smaller ones,  
a structure designed to give every digression its due. Reynolds explains upfront  
that this "book is very much an investigation—not just of the hows and whys of  
retro as a culture and an industry but also of the larger issues to do with living in,  
living off and living with the past." What he's attempting here is an intertwining  
of multiple loosely related trends, such as the enshrinement of pop-cultural arti-  
facts in museums; the recent wave of veteran rock bands playing their old albums,  
track by track, in concert; the popularity of the mash-up; and scattered other ex-  
amples of pop eating itself. Reynolds tries to maintain some objectivity during his  
inspections, but he can't disguise his disdain when, for example, he writes about  
self-proclaimed music nerds who'd rather dig up forgotten northern soul singles

than listen to anything currently on the  
radio. He seems to see these people as  
traitors to their times.

Reynolds is a keen writer, with the  
mind of a critic and the heart of an en-  
thusiast, which makes *Retromania* easy  
to engage; reading it is like bantering  
with a smart friend, not like bristling  
at a lecture. In the same introduction  
where he states his intentions, Reynolds  
admits that he enjoys many aspects of  
retro (though, he adds, "I still feel deep  
down that it is lame and shameful"). If  
anything, Reynolds often waxes as rhap-  
sodic about the artifacts of pop-gone-by  
as do the people who actually dedicate  
their lives to them.

THAT SAID, RETROMANIA FREQUENTLY  
comes off as way too alarmist, espe-  
cially considering how little is actu-  
ally at stake. Reynolds isn't necessarily  
wrong to worry that there's not yet an  
identifiable "sound of the '00s" (or at  
least not one as obvious as the sounds  
of the '60s and '70s). But it's impor-  
tant to remember that Reynolds comes  
from the ranks of music writers who  
wage fierce rhetorical wars over al-  
bums that barely sell in the five figures.  
Noticeably absent from *Retromania*  
are the names of some of the biggest  
pop stars of the moment, who are de-  
fining the sound of this era in ways  
we won't even recognize for another  
decade. And that's not the only point  
that Reynolds either misses or under-  
sells. Consider:

*There's nothing new about "nothing  
new."* To be fair, Reynolds openly ac-  
knowledges that nostalgia movements  
are old hat, and that even the narrowing  
of the gap between "the moment" and  
"fondly remembering the moment" isn't  
strictly a symptom of the '00s. *Retroma-  
nia* is divided into sections titled "Now,"  
"Then," and "Tomorrow," and the "Then"  
section is the strongest, even though it  
undermines some of Reynolds's larger  
case. In it, Reynolds considers the his-  
tory of garage-rock revivalism from the  
1972 *Nuggets* anthology to today, and  
looks back at the multiple throwback UK  
movements that arose in the seventies,  
like pub rock and mod revivalism. He  
examines The Beatles' *White Album* and  
the late-sixties records by The Band and  
Creedence Clearwater Revival, which

all pushed a "back to basics" approach that resonated with those who'd grown weary of the complicated cultural politics of the time. Reynolds even suggests that two musical eras often hailed as revolutionary—punk in the seventies and grunge in the nineties—were in fact reactionary, since they were born out of a yearning for musical simplicity.

Reynolds then shows how the cycle repeats every few years, with retro-influenced acts like the Flamin' Groovies, the New York Dolls, the Ramones, and Bruce Springsteen & the E Street Band emerging periodically, as if from a rock critic's fever dreams. But he fails to acknowledge that all the above-mentioned bands incorporated their rock-and-roll influences into albums that were very much products of their respective eras. No one listens to *Born to Run* and thinks of it as an artifact of the early sixties, no matter the extent to which it's an homage to Phil Spector. No, the album sounds like 1975 for a number of reasons, but primarily because...

*Technology forces change.* Reynolds notes this in passing as well, identifying various revivalist movements that produced music far different from the music that inspired them, simply because recording conditions had improved. In some cases—again, as with Sha Na Na—musicians barely even try to copy their sources. They just make the version of rockabilly or jump-jive that they've always heard in their heads. (Or perhaps they've never heard the music properly; Reynolds observes that the fifties trad-jazz skiffle acts in the UK based their live sound on loud, tinny old records, not on the way jazz actually used to sound in concert in the twenties.) In other cases, musicians try to be trad but come out with something cleaner and punchier than would've been possible decades earlier. Because of the general crudeness of the MP3 format, music booms more than it once did, to overcome the format's technical limitations.

The technology of distribution has changed as well. Compact discs freed artists from the constraints of the forty-minute album, and then MP3s freed consumers from having to buy albums at all. Both of those developments have forced some new approaches to how music is recorded and packaged. Reyn-

olds, though, is skeptical about many of these changes. He decries the rise of the CD box set, saying it gives fans an excuse to put their music on a shelf and never listen to it. He confesses his dislike for iPods, as well, because they're insular instead of communal, and because they encourage users to skip through their record collections.

But, of course, neither of these complaints describes the way things have to be, or even the way things are. A lot of people combine these new technologies. They load box sets onto their iPods; they stream playlists wirelessly through a home stereo so they can listen with their friends. And this is because...

*Most people aren't cultists.* Perhaps this is a function of Reynolds growing up with the more factionalized UK pop scene—where self-identifying as a mod or a rocker or what-have-you is a significant life choice—but when he writes dismissively of those who preach the gospel of the old and rare, he seems not to grasp that it's possible to salivate over a reissue of The Creation's 1967 debut album and still be interested in Kanye West's beautiful dark twisted fantasies. Granted, Reynolds cites some eccentric cases in *Retromania*—like Japanese bars devoted exclusively to narrow cultural interests—but the vast majority of consumers are perfectly capable of digging into the past while also exploring the present. And not every contemporary musical genre is backwards-looking, either. Pop generally isn't, nor is hip-hop, where, as Reynolds notes, the emphasis is more on the shiny and new.

I DON'T WANT TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION that *Retromania* is completely off-base. Reynolds rightly worries that nostalgia might be a stealth form of conservatism, reflecting a fear of progress; and he's right to be concerned about our tendency to embalm the past, turning formerly rebellious artistic movements into museum installations and PBS pledge-drive fodder. He makes solid points when he wonders if the impulse to archive everything on blogs and on YouTube puts the properly discarded junk of the past on the same plane as the treasures; and when he questions whether sampling is a form of exploitation (by way

of railing against pastiche artists like Girl Talk, who specialize in aural versions of a VH1 *I Love the 80s* special); and when he describes restagings of famous concerts, designed to give people who missed a cultural happening a replica of that experience instead of a new experience, relevant to today.

But even Reynolds's best points are refutable. What should be in a museum, if not the elements of culture that mattered most to people? Why shouldn't amateur historians preserve all they can, especially since record companies and movie studios don't seem that interested in keeping our cultural history in print? Is sampling remarkably different from Led Zeppelin "borrowing" an old Howlin' Wolf blues lick for a song? And aren't the ways that people choose to recycle the past a comment on the times in which they live?

Reynolds is sharp enough to catch a lot of those contradictions himself. As he says, this book is meant as "an investigation," not a closing argument. And it's a credit to his skill and wit that *Retromania* is such fun to grapple with.

But it's also telling that these debates don't preoccupy literature or cinema critics the way they do music writers. Only the most avant-garde critics will fault a book or a film for not attempting a major new stylistic breakthrough. Cutting-edge technique is nearly always welcome in all the arts, but if a novel tells an engaging story, or a movie seizes the imagination, that's usually achievement enough. In Reynolds's obsession with how music sounds, he disregards the lyrics, the melody, all the components of a song. And it's the songs that linger, and that ultimately define a time.

Consider contemporary garage-rockers The White Stripes, who get a page or two to themselves in *Retromania*. Frontman Jack White is a nostalgist of the first order, enamored with vintage equipment and archaic rock and blues records. But out of those moldy old influences, he produced "Seven Nation Army," a rock anthem that people chant en masse in sports arenas all over the world. Whatever parts of the past inspired it, it's undeniably a product of now. **CJR**

NOEL MURRAY is a writer and critic who regularly contributes to The Onion's A.V. Club.



## BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

BY JAMES BOYLAN

### **The Long Night: William L. Shirer and The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich**

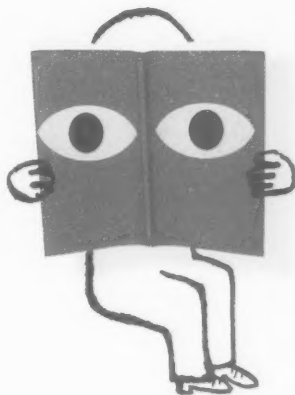
By Steve Wick  
Palgrave Macmillan  
288 pages, \$27

IN 1941, WILLIAM L. SHIRER, one of Edward R. Murrow's team of CBS correspondents in Europe, wrote *Berlin Diary*, an account of his nearly seven years covering the Nazi regime, which he loathed not only for its barbarity but for its crude censorship of his scripts. The book became a best-seller in an America just awakening to the dangers of aggressive totalitarianism, as did his later history, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. Steve Wick's *The Long Night* is a suspenseful recasting of the same period covered in *Berlin Diary*, using the published diary but more importantly the original handwritten pages Shirer smuggled out of Berlin when he left at the end of 1940. They are now archived at Shirer's alma mater, Coe College, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Wick, a *Newsday* senior editor, disavows any claim to being a historian. Still, he has used his resources scrupulously and illuminates, more than does the 1941 book, the heavy personal toll that remaining in Berlin took on Shirer and his family.

### **The President Is a Sick Man**

By Matthew Algeo  
Chicago Review Press  
255 pages, \$24.95

ON JULY 1, 1893, ONLY weeks into his second term, President Grover Cleveland disappeared from the White



House. Nothing was heard of him for several days, until he turned up at his summer house on Buzzards Bay, just west of Cape Cod. And he was not seen publicly until he returned to Washington on August 4, and then only briefly. On August 29, *The Philadelphia Press* carried an exclusive by its Washington columnist, E. J. Edwards, under the headline, THE PRESIDENT A VERY SICK MAN. Edwards revealed that in fact the president had undergone surgery for a tumor in the cigar-chewing area of his mouth while on a yacht bound for Buzzards Bay. All participants had been sworn to secrecy, but one—the dentist-anesthesiologist—had leaked. Those involved denied the story and Edwards was all but drummed out of his profession, although the story was accurate and respectful. Poor Edwards had to wait until 1917 for vindication by one of the surgeons. It's a tale of its time: Who now can imagine a president staying out of

sight for a month? And who can imagine a reporter punished for printing a leak? Matthew Algeo of NPR News tells the story engagingly, if somewhat discursively.

### **Page One: Inside The New York Times**

A film by Andrew Rossi;  
written by Andrew Rossi  
and Kate Novack;  
Magnolia Pictures,  
Participant Media, and

History Films  
88 minutes

### **Page One: Inside The New York Times and the Future of Journalism**

Edited by David Folkenflik  
A Participant Guide  
PublicAffairs Books  
192 pages, \$15.99

PAGE ONE, THE BRISK new documentary with a dull name, portrays *The New York Times* as it rides out the digital tsunami. The historical standard of comparison is the *Times* portrayed in *The Kingdom and the Power*, Gay Talese's 1969 account of the newspaper in its Abe Rosenthal period, approaching the apex of its power and affluence. The *Times* of 2010 is now designated a "legacy" medium (cant for old-fashioned) under strain from the ills that have killed or bankrupted lesser newspapers. The filmmakers had the happy idea of narrowing their inside view of the paper to a few relatively narrow slices: Bill Keller, the executive editor, is seen

dealing with the problems raised by WikiLeaks, accusing The Huffington Post of being a mere aggregator, and presiding over a rather somnolent page-one conference. But the most prominent figure is the media columnist David Carr. His grizzled presence reminds me of old Humphrey Bogart playing the tough editor defending the honor of a dying newspaper in the classic *Deadline—U.S.A.* (1952). Carr, as he goes about his work, uses gruff language to defend and uphold the worth of his embattled employer. He is well aware of the new threats, but asserts stoutly that the *Times* still thrives as a news institution, whatever the means that may eventually be used to distribute it. Carr is complemented by the media department editor, Bruce Headlam, a talented aphorist. Overall, the film is more friendly than critical, to the point that the newspaper itself is sponsoring semi-promotional screenings. The accompanying book assembled by David Folkenflik, media correspondent for NPR News, contains a batch of articles and discussions bearing in one way or another on the documentary's themes. **CJR**

JAMES BOYLAN is the founding editor of the Columbia Journalism Review and professor emeritus of journalism and history at the University of Massachusetts—Amherst.

## The Hatchet's Tale

*Tribune's one-time man in Los Angeles tells all*

BY KEVIN RODERICK

MANY IN THE JOURNALISM CRAFT HAVE watched the decade-long struggles of Chicago's Tribune Company with bewilderment, incredulity, and occasional gasps of horror. The story begins with Tribune, solidly profitable and staidly Midwestern in its values, swooping west to buy the parent company of the *Los Angeles Times* before the CEO realizes it's for sale—stabbed in the back by his

largest stockholders, the coupon-clipping cousins of Otis Chandler, great-grandson of Times Mirror's original president. On creativity alone, it qualified as a brilliant coup. Not even Otis knew the Chandlers *could* sell their Times Mirror stock. The deal created the nation's third-biggest newspaper and television powerhouse.

Closing the deal proved to be the last happy moment Tribune would savor. The suits in Tribune Tower dreamed of merging rival journalism cultures, heartland and left coast, into one contented, synergistic family. That never happened. The Chandlers' addiction to fat dividends burned Tribune, as it had Times Mirror, and led to the emergence of CEO Sam Zell as, arguably, America's most ill-suited media mogul. He openly loathed the journalists he employed, replaced Tribune's old-line Republican executives with uncouth ex-radio hacks, and burdened the company with huge debt. For three years now, Zell's Tribune has lingered in bankruptcy.

In *The Deal From Hell*, James O'Shea gives many of the gory details. The title comes from Zell's reflective quip about his media ownership dalliance. O'Shea puts the label on the whole mess, which he saw up close as a *Chicago Tribune* senior editor, as newspaper tutor to Tribune CEOs, and as Chicago's temporary ambassador to the rebellious Los Angeles newsroom. He was a Chicago partisan who initially celebrated his employer's ambitions—and who relished the chance to humble swelled heads in La-La-Land—until he came to believe that journalism itself was in peril from the likes of Zell and excessive corporate focus on the bottom line.

The book's subtitle, *How Moguls and Wall Street Plundered Great American Newspapers*, suggests ransacking outside invaders. But the tale in it is more about self-inflicted damage from executives, like ex-Tribune CEO Dennis FitzSimons, who fancied themselves as visionaries, but who were more consumed with personal crusades and petty jealousies than with addressing the challenges and opportunities of the digital age. While they tinkered, Tribune's managers let themselves be

**The Deal From Hell:  
How Moguls and Wall Street  
Plundered Great American  
Newspapers**

By James O'Shea  
PublicAffairs  
395 pages, \$28.99

blindsided by larger forces that changed the rules of the media game.

Like many Tribune watchers, I had hoped someone would write a behind-the-scenes book about the company's troubles. I began at the *Times* as a college intern and stayed for twenty-five years, as a Metro reporter, roving correspondent, state desk editor, and senior projects editor. I left for *The Industry Standard* a few months into Tribune's ownership; when the tech bubble burst, taking my new employer with it, I started LA Observed, a blog monitoring the local news scene. The tensions between Tribune and my friends and former colleagues at the *Times* quickly became the biggest media story in town. O'Shea reveals enough juicy details that his Chicago perspective keeps even a biased Angeleno engaged.

The deal from hell, as O'Shea tells it, begins to come together in April, 1999. Tribune held a nice package of papers and TV stations, but CEO John Madigan craved more. He requested a meeting with Mark Willes, CEO of Times Mirror, parent of the *Times*, *Newsday*, *The Baltimore Sun*, and a few smaller newspapers. As the CEOs sat down, Craig Newmark was filing the papers to create Craigslist. Stanford grad students Sergey Brin and Larry Page were preparing to announce Google's initial public funding. And a gift shop clerk in Hollywood was gaining traction for a conservative-leaning news aggregator. His name: Matt Drudge.

NONE OF THOSE EXTERNAL FORCES were on the meeting agenda. Willes didn't even know there was an agenda. Madigan surprised him by laying out a detailed proposal of marriage. In the niceties it was a merger, but Chicago planned to run the household. Willes listened politely and put the matter out of his head. The deal didn't make sense for Times Mirror, and even if it had, provisions of the Chandler family trust forbade a sale, he thought.

Willes had come to Times Mirror in 1995 from General Mills to be a fiscal disciplinarian, charged with upping profits and satisfying the Chandlers' dividend income needs. Many at the *Times* dismissed Willes as the "cereal killer," especially after he closed *Newsday's* money-losing New York edition, but

he was bullish on the future of newspapers, vowing to add a million paying customers. Profits rose on his watch, which made it even more stunning when, months after that April meeting, the Chandler family lawyer informed him that the cousins were selling their family birthright, under a complex stock swap. The paper that built Los Angeles would answer to Chicago. "One of the things I have never been is politically astute," Willes later recalled. "I had no hint at all. I was incredibly naïve."

Willes had provoked the Chandlers by naming himself publisher and acting like more than their hired hand, O'Shea writes. Then there was a humiliating scandal: Willes's successor as publisher, Kathryn Downing, had approved a plan to share profits from a special issue of the Sunday magazine with the subject of the issue, the new Staples Center arena in downtown Los Angeles. The scheme was so embarrassing that Otis Chandler phoned in a statement from his retirement retreat. The Staples deal was "unbelievably stupid and unprofessional," Chandler said, and the Willes era "the single most devastating period in the history of this great newspaper."

In comparison, the post-merger era began smoothly. Chicago sent a fresh team to reassure Los Angeles, led by publisher John Puerner and the respected editor John Carroll. He stressed investigations, won Pulitzers, and shrunk the layers of editing that reporters dislike. The honeymoon was nice, but quarreling soon began. Tribune had overpaid for Times Mirror. Profits were sagging, and there was scant financial benefit to Tribune's idea of leveraging its TV stations and papers in a fantasy of city-by-city synergy. Chicago pressured its properties to slash costs. Among the easiest reductions were the now-redundant executives in Los Angeles. Puerner cut staff from 5,300 to 3,400.

The Times newsroom was largely spared, but not for long. In Chicago, everyone felt the Times was fat—its bureaus overstaffed, its reporters coddled and overcompensated. But mostly, Chicago felt Times people looked down on them. "We all resented the insolence toward our paper," O'Shea writes. The cost-cutting directives from Chicago grew more personal and painful. In one

incredible frenzy in 2005-06, Carroll resigned as editor and Puerner as publisher, saying the cuts Chicago wanted were devastating and unnecessary. A new publisher groomed in Tribune culture, Jeff Johnson, also refused to cut. "Newspapers can't cut their way to the future," he said, infuriating his bosses. Dean Baquet, Carroll's successor, was next to go for pushing back at Chicago.

## Chicago's cost-cutting directives grew more personal and painful.

O'Shea was dispatched to LA in November 2006 to be the third editor in two years. Friends advised him not to go. "No matter what you do, you will always be viewed as a hatchet man from Chicago," Times managing editor Doug Frantz warned. He took the job, and an apartment on the beach—too good an opportunity to pass up, O'Shea writes. He supervised deep cuts, but writes that he successfully resisted worse demands from Chicago. In the sixteen months before his time came too—over yet more staff cuts, of course—O'Shea takes credit for streamlining the Times's structure, adding a profitable new fashion section, and steering the paper toward smarter use of the Internet. (Times journalists, who remember O'Shea more as an aloof editor, might dispute some of that.)

Before he left, the Tribune story took a twist that has yet to be resolved. The Chandlers, worried about their declining dividend checks, forced the company to consider takeover offers. The winner was Sam Zell, a Chicago investor known for buying depressed assets and riding them to huge profits. At first, his new staff was optimistic that Zell would stop the bleeding. But he proved to be even less of a friend than his predecessors. In one notorious incident, he barked "fuck you" at a female photographer who dared to ask about news values. He mocked his editors, and in a visit to the Times shocked staffers when he an-

nounced that the paper would start taking ads from strip clubs because, as he said, "it's un-American not to like pussy."

With Zell came executives of dubious value, like CEO Randy Michaels, who resigned after *The New York Times* exposed his boorish treatment of women, and chief innovation officer Lee Abrams, roundly mocked for his rambling, poorly punctuated all-staff e-mails. But the bigger issue is that the Zell deal burdened Tribune with huge debt, adding pressure for even more cuts. O'Shea's reporting on this point makes for instructive reading on the perils facing today's media business. His book joins that conversation, while avoiding the neatly wrapped solutions that some might want.

HE WRITES IN SUMMATION THAT "THE real question we face is not whether we still have newspapers; the real question is, will we still have journalism—not aggregated content gathered to foster ad sales—but hard-hitting, time consuming investigative and analytical reporting." Of course, hard-hitting analysis is alive and well online and more easily accessible now to a reader in, say, Fresno than in the days when a wire editor at *The Fresno Bee* chose a few stories for inside pages. Investigative reporting is still as difficult and expensive as ever, but innovators like ProPublica and California Watch are trying to fill in the gaps left by the weakening of newspapers.

Some are weaker than others. His old paper, the *Chicago Tribune*, has become "sophomoric, parochial, and superficial," O'Shea writes. He cancelled his subscription. The Times, meanwhile, is far smaller in size and paid circulation than it once was. Still, this year the paper won a pair of Pulitzer prizes.

O'Shea has proven himself adaptable. He now runs the Chicago News Cooperative, a website that also produces local news stories for the Chicago edition of *The New York Times*. One of his fundraising stops was the McCormick Foundation, where he had to pitch David Hiller, the publisher who fired him in Los Angeles. O'Shea didn't get the money. **CJR**

KEVIN RODERICK is a Los Angeles author, radio commentator, and the editor-publisher of *LAObserved.com*.

# Bang Bang Off Target

Hollywood gets war reporters wrong again

BY JUDITH MATLOFF

IN A KEY MOMENT IN THE RECENT FILM *The Bang Bang Club*, South African war photographer Greg Marinovich, complaining of thirst, dashes past snipers to fetch Cokes across the street. As the daredevil, eluding bullets, slides back with the drinks like a man scoring a home run, his comrades chortle.

It's an eye-poppingly cinematic moment, even if it didn't quite happen that way. The real-life Marinovich did take a calculated risk during a lull in shooting in search of a soda, but figured that he could make the run in safety, having done so many times before. His colleagues would not have been so amused if he had risked his life over a drink, and in any case most of the time Marinovich operated with greater caution.

So it goes with *The Bang Bang Club*, which is based on the memoir that Marinovich wrote with João Silva, the two survivors of a quartet of young white lensmen who drove into black townships to chronicle factional fighting in the final days of apartheid. The film depicts the photographers as reckless thrill-seekers, swaggering into newsrooms like rock stars and canoodling with babes, when not jumping into cars to chase "Bang Bang" (violence). Bad stuff happens—one guy, Ken Oosterbroek, dies in crossfire and another, Kevin Carter, commits suicide. Marinovich takes a bullet and almost perishes. But the lasting impression is that these were adventurers who profited off others' misery.

As it happens, Marinovich, Silva, and company were hardly callous opportunists who cared only about getting the big pictures. Nor did they enjoy nearly half the amount of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll that director Steven Silver would have us believe. I know because I worked with Carter as a member of the Johannesburg press corps in the early 1990s. Marinovich took pictures at my wedding and Silva shot the cover of my first book. Yes, all of us to some degree were out for careers and money, and all of us lived off adrenaline. But the reporters and photographers stationed in South Africa at the time were also compassionate human beings who exposed themselves to danger because they wanted to record history. This doesn't particularly come through in the film.

Instead, Silver plays to the Hollywood stereotype of journalists as heartless out-

siders. After a fun day taking pictures of black people massacring each other, the lads go back to the white suburbs and party—the implication being that the bloodshed is a game to them. He doesn't get that these photographers cared passionately about their country, and that they exposed themselves to hazard not for kicks but to document the amazing political transformation taking place.

THE FILM IS THE LATEST HOLLYWOOD production to get the role of the conflict correspondent wrong. With rare exception, cinema glamorizes and simplifies war, and it also simplifies the role of the journalists who cover it. To test the theory that screenwriters consistently misrepresent combat correspondents, I took a look at several seminal features made over the past four decades, including *The Green Berets* (1968), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Salvador* (1986), *Under Fire* (1983), *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *The Killing Fields* (1984), and *We Were Soldiers* (2002). Watch one or all and you'll come to the same conclusion: war correspondents are misguided souls or narcissists with dubious codes of ethics.

Perhaps the worst extreme is Dennis Hopper's crazed photographer in *Apocalypse Now*, a man so drugged one marvels he can hold a camera. The cynical hacks depicted in *Salvador*, *Under Fire*, and *The Year of Living Dangerously* don't fare much better on the sympathy scale. Redemption only comes when these neutral observers take sides. On screen, in such tours of Vietnam as *Full Metal Jacket*, *The Green Berets*, and *We Were Soldiers*, journalists actually pick up arms. The lead in *Welcome to Sarajevo* (1997) proves his humanity by smuggling a girl out of Bosnia. *Under Fire*'s Nick Nolte goes so far as to fake a photo to save the revolution. Never mind that real reporters would get fired for that.

More disturbing, the silver screen belittles the idea that documenting history is not necessarily inferior to actively participating in it.

"Many of us believed in the value of what we were doing, bearing witness to the killing in the townships," author and television producer Hamilton Wende told me, when asked about the motivations of white cameramen in South

## The Bang Bang Club

Tribeca Film

Written and directed by Steven Silver

Starring Ryan Phillippe, Taylor Kitsch,

Malin Akerman, Frank Rautenbach, and

Neels Van Jaarsveld

106 minutes





**Hollywood** Actor Ryan Phillippe, top, playing Greg Marinovich, reenacting events from the day of Ken Oosterbroek's 1994 death  
**History** A photo by Bang Bang Club member João Silva, bottom, of a fatally wounded African National Congress supporter, taken the day after Oosterbroek's death

Africa. "God, I still can't believe some of the terrible things I saw and filmed. I lost count long, long ago of the number of bodies I filmed, but as shocking and frightening as those deaths were, our filming them made a contribution to their not having died in vain." Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a moral force in the fight against apartheid, acknowledged as much in his introduction to Marinovich and Silva's book: "We owe

them a tremendous debt for their contribution to the fragile process of transition from repression to democracy, from injustice to freedom."

The book resonated for Silver, who came of age in South Africa during the depicted events. In the film, he is at his best when he sticks to reality, striking gold in painstakingly authentic recreations of township hostilities. The advancing warriors who wave machetes

and guns felt so real that I broke into an anxious sweat remembering what it was like. The director filmed in the exact locations where skirmishes took place and he hired extras from the actual communities, which meant that they were not acting but reliving events.

And yet, verisimilitude notwithstanding, the political story gets lost in the film. What the viewer sees are black people slaughtering each other, without context for understanding that the future of South Africa hinged on stopping the brutality. In fact, the white supremacist government was supporting Zulus who were fighting Nelson Mandela's supporters. The Bang Bang Club sought to expose this travesty, yet you don't get a sense of their mission from the film. Nor do you get a sense of their ultimate sobriety of purpose.

THE FILM FLUBS OTHER DETAILS, TOO. Silver portrays photographer Abdul Shariff as a rookie who begs to work with the white guys and then naively stands up in the line of fire. "It was incredibly false and it makes me cringe," says Tom Cohen, a former Associated Press reporter who was nearby when Shariff died running for cover. "To take a man who had built his own portfolio covering apartheid and present him as this green kid who calls Greg 'sir' and is too dumb to duck fire is amazingly demeaning."

Other colleagues chafed at the way Silver took liberties with the lifestyle. The guys are shown living it up in bars with hot chicks hanging over them whenever a prize or paycheck rolls in. While war reporters are notorious for womanizing and getting stoned, in both films and real life, in this case only Carter abused substances and the other three photographers were in committed relationships. Any drinking tended to be done morosely at home as the men tried to make sense of the complicity in documenting savagery. Marinovich's on-screen affair with photo editor Robin Comley, well, that never happened, so I suppose the character is meant to provide requisite box office steam. She's certainly not believable as a photo editor. The scene where she expresses horror that Marinovich is coolly adjusting the lighting over a corpse is ludicrous.

Of course, as a feature film *The Bang Bang Club* has to pull in audiences, and flesh means entertainment. As Silver explained to me, "This is not a news story." He went on to quote Norman Mailer, who at one point said an author has a privileged relationship with the truth. "When you have to condense time and characters, it's about the essence of the story," argued Silver. "You hope that comes through." It doesn't.

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**While many of us have chosen to save a life at times, it is not our primary mission to intervene. Our role is to provide evidence of what we see; to convey reality without getting involved.**

What's most surprising about Silver's perspective is that he comes from the world of documentary filmmaking. *The Bang Bang Club* is his first foray into features, and he dramatizes the choices the protagonists made while leaving the audience to judge whether they should have intervened to save lives. He hints at voyeurism while recreating the macabre images that won Pulitzers for Marinovich and Carter—the former of a man hacked and burned to death, and the latter of a vulture stalking a starving girl in Sudan.

Carter, in fact, was so tormented by critics' assertions that he should have whisked the toddler to safety—again, not our job, and there were aid workers nearby—that he alluded to the girl in his suicide note just months after winning the prize. Many viewers I spoke to left thinking Carter was right to feel bad. I disagree. While many of us have chosen to save a life at times, it is not our primary mission to intervene. Our role is to provide evidence of what we see; to convey reality without getting involved.

To depict the neutral journalist as somehow morally inferior to aid workers, doctors, and other non-combatants is a one-dimensional reading of a com-

plex situation. In fact, many journalists cover conflict because of a sense of moral indignation. The Bang Bang Club members in particular were not parachuting into a foreign country; they were South Africans disgusted by their government's inhumanity. The act of bearing witness and placing oneself at risk in trying to make some sense of the horror is work deserving of a more nuanced treatment. It might depict Mari-

novich's friendships with blacks in the townships, something that comes out in the book but not the movie. Or maybe it would show the discipline required to get up every morning at 4 a.m. and face the unspeakable with professional calm (which should not be mistaken for lack of compassion). Only Carter is given a soul in the movie, yet all four were principled human beings.

The movie stops in 1994, the year Mandela was elected president in the country's first democratic vote. But the correspondents' lives today are ever shadowed by the ones they lived during that time. After taking some of the iconic images of South Africa's tumult, the two authors went on to cover conflagrations abroad, although violence eventually sidelined them both.

AFTER BEING WOUNDED BY GUNFIRE four times, the last in Afghanistan, Marinovich finally swore off combat eleven years ago. He's made peace with peace and much prefers to shoot documentaries about traditional African customs and spend time with his kids, now aged four and six. He is working on another book, about a murderer who married his mother.

"Suddenly it all catches up," Marinovich told me. "You put all these barriers between yourself and suddenly the reality is there and it's not a bubble any longer. I got wounded so many times, once critically, that I no longer thought, 'Well it's not going to happen to me.' So I thought, 'Okay, time for something different.'"

Like most writers of memoirs that have become movies, Marinovich "disassociates" himself from the film version. "It has the same title but it is not the same story. It's not my life. I don't see the character as me." Yet choosing his words carefully, he absolves Silver of responsibility to him. "Filmmakers and writers don't have to stick to the facts."

Silva is facing a harder time adapting to civilian life. A misstep in a minefield in Afghanistan last October blew his two legs off below the knee and he has undergone more than fifteen operations to repair his bowels and urinary tract. When I visited him in May, Silva could only move on his prosthetics with a walker or metal bars, and many days was too drained by repeated infections to get out of bed. Doctors expect him to remain in Washington DC's Walter Reed Army Medical Center until the end of the year, separated from his wife and two young children in South Africa.

The day we met, Silva had just attended a photo shoot with *New York* magazine for a spread on war photographers, and the irony was not lost on him that this time he was on the wrong side of the camera. "I don't want a future taking studio portraits with lights," he said resolutely. "I want to get back in the field."

A nurse entered with an x-ray machine and a cup of pills. Silva reached for a bottle of water but it dropped and rolled away on the floor. I waited for an awkward beat to see if he wanted me to pick it up. With a resigned face he nodded, "Yes."

It was a quiet drama, nothing like racing past snipers. But it sure carried a punch. **CJR**


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JUDITH MATLOFF is a veteran foreign correspondent who teaches conflict reporting at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. She is the author of *Home Girl* and *Fragments of a Forgotten War*.

They bought it for \$1. Did they overpay?

# A REVIEW OF TINA BROWN'S NEWSWEEK BY TED RALL

TINA BROWN UNDERSTANDS WHAT A WEEKLY NEWS MAGAZINE CAN/SHOULD BE:



"IT'S ABOUT FILLING THE GAPS LEFT WHEN A STORY HAS SEEMINGLY PASSED... OR COMING UP WITH AN INSIGHT OR SYNTHESIS THAT CONNECTS THE ... DOTS." \*

\* FROM BROWN'S INTRODUCTORY NOTE TO HER FIRST ISSUE

THE PRODUCT YOU CAN ACTUALLY BUY AT THE NEWSSTAND, HOWEVER, IS A CRASHING DISAPPOINTMENT.

CELEB FEMALE IN THE NEWS BUT WHOM NO ONE TALKS ABOUT



LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS YOU'VE ALREADY SEEN SO OFTEN THEY'VE EITHER ALREADY SAID IT ALL OR YOU CAN PREDICT THEIR VIEWS

INSIDE: PHOTOS!

Inside, everything is a mishmash...

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**News Beast**

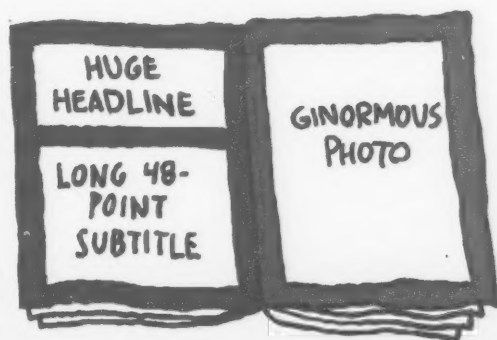
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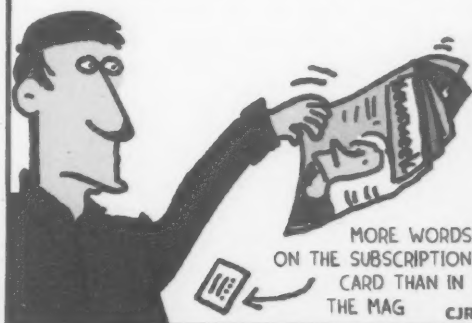
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Top 50 Lists of the Top 10 Actresses in the Top 5 Movies

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# COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

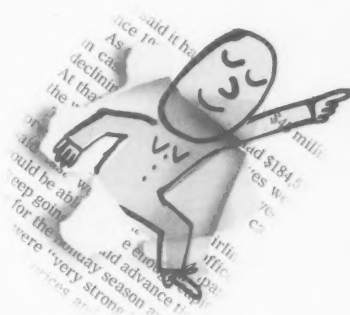
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# The Climate for Science Reporting

BY MICHAEL SCHUDSON AND JULIA SONNEVEND



EARLY IN DECEMBER 2009, POLITICIANS, media representatives, and NGO officials queued up outside the Bella Center from eight in the morning until late in the afternoon for the Copenhagen climate-change summit—in freezing conditions: “Some...gave up, complaining that global warming had not reached Scandinavia.” This may be the only light-hearted moment in James Painter’s “Summoned by Science: Reporting Climate Change at Copenhagen and Beyond,” an eighty-nine-page report published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism last November. Painter runs the institute’s journalism fellowship program, after a career at the BBC and other organizations covering climate change, the media, and Latin America.

The most striking single item in Painter’s report is a number: 3,221 journalists attended the Copenhagen summit—more than double the number of journalists at any of the twelve previous climate summits (surpassed only by the first one, in Kyoto in 1997, which included a great many television technicians required by the more labor-intensive technologies of those ancient days). Three thousand-some journalists does not quite put climate summits in the same league as coverage of the Olympics, the World Cup, or Will and Kate’s wedding, but it is comparable to the number of journalists covering US presidential elections.

Though 85 percent of the journalists in Copenhagen came from developed countries, there were still more than six hundred journalists from the developing world. Two hundred and forty-three journalists came from online publications, thirty-three of them from Google. The US, Germany, France, Japan, the UK, and host Denmark each had more than two hundred journalists at the conference. And Sweden, Norway, China, and Brazil each had one hundred or more.

With all of those journalists at their marks, the odds of substantive coverage appeared high. But in an analysis of newspaper coverage from twelve countries (based on one upscale and one popular paper in each country), Painter was dismayed that only 9 percent of the stories about the summit devoted half or more of their space to scientific questions. Given that the Copenhagen meeting was not an exclusively scientific meeting but a policy-oriented deliberative assembly, Painter’s complaint seems a bit wayward. Moreover, as Painter relates, the total number of stories was high. And while only 9 percent of stories devoted more than

half of their space to science, another 13 percent committed 10 to 50 percent of their space to it.

And within Painter’s report there are other grounds for optimism. It has been well documented that journalists have too often given equal voice to skeptics of global warming, against the overwhelming consensus among scientists. (See Maxwell Boykoff and Jules Boykoff’s paper, “Balance as Bias,” a study of coverage from 1998 to 2002 in the US prestige press.) But Painter’s study does not confirm that trend: in the 427 stories he sampled, global-warming skeptics were quoted by name only twice, and the generic term “skeptics” was used four times. Painter himself sees hopeful signs in the global-warming blogosphere because it includes “serious and well-informed bloggers who are not driven by political ideologies or by money from the fossil fuel lobby.”

The main trouble with science coverage, suggest historians of science Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway in their 2010 book *Merchants of Doubt*, is not that science journalists are insufficiently respectful of scientific consensus but that they insufficiently understand that consensus is all science ever provides. “History shows us clearly that science does not provide certainty. It does not provide proof,” they write. “It only provides the consensus of experts, based on the organized accumulation and scrutiny of evidence.” What Oreskes and Conway show is that global-warming skeptics, like acid-rain skeptics, smoking-causes-cancer skeptics, second-hand-smoke-is-dangerous skeptics, damage-to-the-ozone skeptics (many of them the same individuals), exploit the naïve popular belief that “scientific” means “absolutely certain.”

So while Painter’s report offers ample evidence of a surge of interest in climate-change reporting, and may even indicate improvement in the quality of that reporting, the question remains: Can journalists produce reasonable science coverage if the public holds unreasonable expectations of science? **CJR**

MICHAEL SCHUDSON teaches at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. JULIA SONNEVEND is a Ph.D. student in Communications at Columbia.

# The Lower Case

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## **Utah:**

**Incompetent sex  
offender freed**

*The Berkshire Eagle (Pittsfield, MA) 4/8/11*

**Navy SEALs Responsible For Getting Osama  
bin Laden To Be Honored At 9/11 Museum**

*CBS New York website 5/2/11*

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**Rollover wreck after family reunion kills Greenville woman**

*The Daily Reflector (Greenville, NC) 5/10/11*

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*The Seattle Times 5/18/11*

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*The Bellingham (WA) Herald 5/4/11*

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*The Washington Post 5/20/11*

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*Iowa City Press-Citizen 5/24/11*

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*The New York Times 4/17/11*

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**Community, friends, family remember slaying victim**

*The Advocate (Baton Rouge, LA) 9/30/10*

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*BBC World website 5/19/10*

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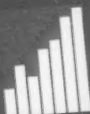
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